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Washingtonian

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William H. Webster Is Washington's Smartest Bureaucrat. Almost Always Smiling, Rarely Raising His Voice, He's Rebuilt the FBI into a More Powerful, More Dangerous Police Force Than It Ever Was Under J. Edgar Hoover.

By Blaine Harden

For J. Edgar Hoover, the moment would have been delicious. The forum was a hearing before a friendly, almost fawning Senate subcommittee. The star witness was the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The senators were asking hanging-curve-ball questions—the kind any self-respecting small-town police chief, let along America's top cop, could hit out of the ballpark.

Senator John P. East, the conservative Republican from North Carolina, threw the fastest pitch of all. He asked if the balance in law enforcement in the United States had tipped "against society and in favor of the criminal element."

Had Hoover been asked such a question, the Director would have rounded up his usual suspects for the decline of Western Civilization. They included, in Hoover's words, "theorists, pseudo-criminologists, hypersentimentalists, criminal coddlers, convict lovers, and fiddle-faced reformers." Crooks were "rats," those who kept them out of jail were "yammerheads," and that, in Hoover's cosmology of criminal jurisprudence, was that.

The FBI director, however, who had to answer Senator East's question was William H. Webster. And Webster, ignoring the senator's invitation to law-and-order demagoguery, responded with a 700-word lecture on justice in America. First, he stroked East's ego by assuring the senator that this question was intelligent. Then the director (only Hoover, dead twelve years, is the Director) acknowledged "serious problems" in the criminal-justice system. He said legal technicalities should not protect those who are clearly guilty of crime. But he added that police must always understand and honor those technicalities, no matter how complicated. Webster closed by saying that he felt the rights of society and of accused lawbreakers were in a near "state of balance."

It was all so smooth, so measured, so unquotable, so utterly unlike anything J. Edgar Hoover said in his 48-year reign over the FBI. Indeed, a couple of Webster's remarks made him sound suspiciously like a "theorist" or even a

PHOTOGRAPH BY NORA KENGLE

"yammerhead." Webster had refused to play ball with East's lock-up-the-vermin biases. He had gently chastised the senator for paying more attention to appearance than to fact. But he was so blandly polite about it that the senator did not seem to notice.

That answer stands as a near-perfect example of what William Hedgcock Webster has done at the FBI. The former federal judge from St. Louis—who has run the FBI for more than six years, longer than anyone except Hoover—has radically changed the mission, image, and techniques of America's only national police force. Yet "the judge," as he likes to be called, has been so polite, so studiedly colorless that few Americans seem to have noticed either the magnitude of the changes or the man who effected them. The judge has presided over an anomalous era at the FBI, an era in which the Bureau has become both bigger and less publicized, more powerful and less feared, more capable of violating the civil liberties of Americans and less disposed to do so.

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The FBI's Webster era, however, may soon end. The judge does not plan to complete his ten-year term as director, a non-renewable term that expires in 1988. He has told friends that he has accomplished what he set out to do when he moved to Washington in 1978 and that he will probably leave the FBI in August when he becomes eligible for a government pension.

William Webster's departure raises the possibility that the FBI again could become what it was for much of the 1960s and '70s—a highly politicized, often out-of-control secret police. In 1973, William Ruckleshaus, during his tumultous 70-day tenure as acting FBI director, warned that the Bureau has "enormous power and thus can be a force for evil as well as good. . . . The FBI does not exist aside from the people in it. More particularly, it owes much of its force, effectiveness, and tone to its director."

Civil libertarians, fearful of the past repeating itself and already exercised by Ronald Reagan's nomination of Edwin Meese III as attorney general, are afraid that Webster's successor will be neither as non-ideological nor as independent as the judge. They fear that, unlike Webster, a new FBI director will be unwilling to stand up to his boss in the Justice Department. Meese, a law-and-order activist who is known in the White House as "Officer Ed," made no secret of his distaste for legal technicalities that interfere with criminal prosecutions or for judges who meddle in social issues.

"If and when Webster leaves and we get somebody Reagan selects, we can only expect real problems," worries Representative Don Edwards, once an FBI agent and now a liberal California Democrat who chairs the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights.

The FBI director who succeeds Webster will take control of a 20,000-member police force that, said Webster in an interview, "is not like any traditional bureaucratic organization. . . . It wants to respond to leadership." Those who worry about a replay of the bad old days at the FBI would do well to understand what sort of man Webster is and how he has so quietly expanded the power of a paramilitary bureaucracy where the three most powerful words in the English language continue to be "The director wants. . . ."

As an appointee of Jimmy Carter's, Webster came to Washington to salvage an agency whose reputation had taken a precipitous fall. Under Hoover, the Bureau had insinuated itself into American mythology as the epitome of right-thinking, clean-shaven, crook-catching professionalism. That myth was soiled in the 1970s by Senate investigations and news reports exposing the FBI's seamy side. Between 1965 and 1975, according to Gallup pollsters, the percentage of Americans who gave the FBI a "highly favorable" rating fell from 84 to 37 percent.

FBI agents, in the public mind, were no longer fearless, upstanding G-men. Some appeared as black-bag thugs for whom illegal break-ins, blackmail, and bedroom buggings were all part of a crusade called COINTELPRO. That counterintelligence crusade was supposed to protect "right-thinking" Americans from those who, in Hoover's words, were "subversive force[s] dedicated to the complete destruction of our traditional democratic values."

Webster, according to civil libertarians who had been most critical of the Bureau, quickly convinced his agents that no one would get ahead in his FBI by tromping on the civil rights of any American. In a characteristically quiet, even-handed decision, he fired or disciplined FBI supervisors who had ordered illegal surveillance of relatives and friends of the Weather Underground fugitives. He refused to punish, and won the allegiance of, agents who had simply followed orders. Webster demanded more legal training for FBI agents and made sure they were apprised within 48 hours of changes in federal law related to their investigative authority.

"Whatever maverick FBI agents there are out there around the country, if they stray away from the legal path, they know they will not get support in Washington," says Frank J. Donner, a civil-liberties lawyer and author of *The Age of Surveillance*. "The perception of risk [for renegade agents] is greater under Webster than it has ever been before."

Webster also has given the FBI the independence to dare disagree with public statements by the President—something that Hoover, for all his vaunted power, almost never did. Webster's independence survived Carter's defeat and has been asserted repeatedly, if diplomatically, under Ronald Reagan. In the fall of 1982, Reagan said there was "plenty of evidence" that the Soviet Union had "inspired" and was "manipulating" the US nuclear-freeze movement. Last August, Webster flatly, but quietly, said Reagan was wrong. In a written reply to a question from Senator Orrin G. Hatch of Utah, Webster stated, "There is no evidence. . .that the Soviets or the organizations they control have a dominant role in the US peace movement."

While tidying up the FBI's image, Webster has—again, quietly—expanded his power. His FBI has won sharp increases in spending on law-enforcement hardware and personnel, as well as far-reaching increases in investigative authority.

Since Webster took over in 1978, the FBI's budget has more than doubled to just over $1 billion a year. With an 8.8 percent increase in the 1985 budget request, a request that is usually sacrosanct in Congress, the Bureau is one of the fastest-growing parts of the federal government.

The number of FBI agents is at an all-time high of 8,488 (with a record 11,580 clerical and technical employees). By the end of next year, the Bureau will have spent more than $430 million for a computer-network and communications system that will permit almost instantaneous access in 59 field offices to the FBI's huge criminal and investigative data bank.

In the wake of Abscam—Webster's most publicized and, for the most part, applauded investigation—the FBI has

made an unprecedented plunge into undercover operations that rely on bribe money, underworld informants, electronic bugs, and concealed cameras. These undercover operations target individuals who, in Webster's words, "smell" suspicious. In the past six years, the annual number of these investigations has increased sixfold, from 56 to more than 315. Undercover spending on bribe money and equipment, not counting salaries, has increased ninefold.

Building on changes initiated by his predecessor, Clarence M. Kelley, Webster has backed the FBI away from its obsession with bank robbery and car theft and aimed it at investigations of white-collar and organized crime, espionage, and terrorism. When the Reagan administration pressured Webster to do more about violent crime, he moved the Bureau into drug enforcement, a move that Hoover had long resisted for fear his agents would be corrupted. In one of the smoothest bureaucratic takeovers ever seen in Washington, Webster two years ago gained control of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), with its 2,200 agents and $290 million budget. He appointed his loyal friend and former FBI executive Francis M. (Bud) Mullen to run the agency. On a hot-line telephone, Webster calls Mullen's office nearly every day.

The cap on Webster's empire-building is a new set of guidelines expanding the FBI's authority to investigate and infiltrate domestic political groups. The guidelines replace more restrictive rules handed down in 1976 by former attorney general Edward H. Levi, rules that were intended to prevent a recurrence of past FBI abuses. The new guidelines, issued last year by Attorney General William French Smith, allow the FBI to launch a full-scale investigation based entirely on "advocacy" of crime, particularly violent crime. They also allow the FBI to amass dossiers, using public information, on any domestic group. Finally, the new guidelines allow preliminary investigations—using informers and undercover agents—to begin solely on the basis of an "allegation or information indicating the possibility of criminal activity."

Webster has built a law-enforcement empire that is more powerful than anything Hoover ever had. Yet the judge says he will not allow the FBI to run roughshod again over the constitutional rights of Americans. And many of the FBI's most severe critics believe him.

"On civil liberties, it is the difference between night and day in Hoover's era and Webster's FBI," says Jerry J. Berman, legislative council for the American Civil Liberties Union.

For nearly half a century, from 1924 to his death in 1972, J. Edgar Hoover (top left) was the nation's number-one G-man. The publicity-wise Hoover made himself the most famous bureaucrat in American history. He was succeeded by L. Patrick Gray III (top right), whose one-year tenure as acting director embroiled him in the Watergate scandal. William D. Ruckelshaus (bottom left), now head of the EPA, served less than three months as acting director in 1973. Clarence M. Kelley (bottom right), a former Kansas City police chief, directed the Bureau from 1973 to 1978. In the lobby at the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building on Pennsylvania Avenue, the Bureau has chosen not to display portraits of Gray or Ruckelshaus.

"Webster is not ideological. Without question he has changed the style of the FBI. He is not deceptive," says Victor Navasky, editor of *The Nation*, a liberal journal that for decades was shelved in the FBI's New York field office alongside Communist-produced publications.

Judge Webster, quite simply, is an easy man to trust. It begins with his looks. Good looks, often underestimated as a part of leadership, are especially important in the FBI. Back in the early 1960s, when 40 million Americans tuned in to *The FBI* television show every week, Efrem Zimbalist Jr. epitomized the perfect G-man. He was handsome, polite, smart, patriotic, and neatly attired. Hoover admired Zimbalist so much that, according to one of his publicists, the Director demanded that FBI recruiters look for new agents who conformed to the "Zimmy image." Webster does. If anything, the judge is better looking and better dressed than Zimmy.

Webster's eyes are blue, his jaw is square, and his waist is trim. He has what one friend calls a "pixie" smile. When he gets angry, associates say, his blue eyes turn cold, his soft voice grows even softer. Webster's dark-brown hair is always crisply parted, and his hairline is as resolutely non-receding as Reagan's. (Webster's hair is trimmed regularly at FBI headquarters by Ray Cabacar, a for-

mer Navy steward who is also the chief cook in the FBI executive dining room.)

A Christian Scientist, Webster rarely drinks and never smokes. The drink in his hand at official Washington gatherings is usually 7-Up.

Griffin B. Bell, the former attorney general who has said Webster's selection to run the FBI was Carter's best appointment, says the judge was chosen because "he was intelligent, had unusual balance, was a straight-arrow type, and had a partician approach. He is quiet and he moves in quiet ways."

Webster invariably dresses in dark suits, usually pin-striped, with cuffed pants, button-down shirts, and rep ties. At the age of 60, with gray beginning to frost his temples, he has the look of a well-born, well-compensated executive who keeps in shape at the country club.

Tennis is Webster's passion. Friends say he is a sound player, more driven to win than skilled. He plays several times a week at St. Albans Tennis Club against members of the Washington establishment, including members of Congress and prominent journalists such as syndicated columnist Carl Rowan and Fred Graham of CBS News. "He has a funny-looking serve," says Graham, who often reports on the FBI. "But he beats players you wouldn't think he could." Graham says there is "some truth" to the notion that Webster's friendship with selected Washington journalists has helped diffuse the mutual hostility between the FBI and the media in the 1970s.

Within a few years, nearly every senior official in FBI headquarters and in the 59 field offices was a Webster appointee whose loyalty was to the current director.

The son of a prosperous St. Louis businessman who owned and operated a number of small firms, including the St. Louis Ear Mold Laboratory, Webster grew up wanting to be a lawyer. He attended Amherst College, a highly regarded liberal-arts college in Massachusetts where a midwesterner can make career contacts and acquire a bit of eastern sophistication. Former CIA director Stansfield Turner, a college classmate and friend, says Webster was a serious student "but not a stick-in-the-mud." He headed the debating club, belonged to a fraternity and two honor societies, and went to church regularly. At Amherst, Webster established a pattern for professional probity and highbrow social involvement that he has maintained throughout his life.

After serving in the Navy in both World War II and the Korean War and graduating from Washington University Law School in St. Louis, Webster built a $120,000-a-year corporate-law practice in his hometown. (His net worth when he was confirmed as FBI director in February 1978 was $880,296.) He and his wife, Drusilla, belonged to several exclusive clubs in St. Louis, and one of their daughters was a debutante at the Veiled Prophet Ball, an event sponsored by that city's oldest, most powerful families.

Since coming to Washington, Webster and his wife have become regulars at black-tie social events and diplomatic parties. Friends say the judge enjoys and is good at social hobnobbing. He is past president of the Alfalfa Club, an exclusive organization of powerful Washington men. But unlike many of his high-powered peers, Webster does little official entertaining at home. He usually invites only close friends, many of them from St. Louis, to his $358,000 house in Bethesda. (The house, on a wooded lot with a swimming pool, is not guarded by the FBI. A driver takes the director to and from work in a government sedan. A close friend says Webster insists on sitting beside the driver in the front seat.)

In St. Louis, Webster was active in Republican politics and served two years as a US attorney. President Nixon chose Webster in 1971 to be a US district court judge, and he accepted the $40,000-a-year job, although it meant a big cut in pay. He took the job, he says, when the country "was going through the riots, the burning of ROTC buildings and so forth. I was convinced that the next generation would question whether the systems works. Some of us could prove maybe that it did work."

In 1973, Nixon elevated Webster to the 8th US Circuit Court of Appeals, where he compiled a generally conservative record. He was unwilling to let police procedural errors interfere with criminal convictions, but he often stood up for the constitutional rights of minorities. He was labeled a "do-gooder" by the warden at the St. Louis City Jail after he ordered sweeping reforms to correct what he termed "inhumane" conditions.

Webster was one of six people whose backgrounds were checked when a vacancy opened up on the US Supreme Court in 1975. For much of his life, friends say, Webster has coveted a seat on the high court. He lunches several times a year with his friends Chief Justice Warren Burger and Associate Justice Harry Blackmun, usually in the Supreme Court dining room.

When Webster learned he was being considered for the FBI job, he went to a St. Louis public library and took out several books on the Bureau. He had never wanted to be an FBI agent, had never considered running the national police force. He decided to take the job, he says, for the same reason that he became a judge: He is a patriot, and his country needed him. Weeks before he moved to Washington, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* carried a profile of the local-boy-turned-number-one-G-man. The story, quoting an unnamed long-time friend of Webster's, assessed his character this way:

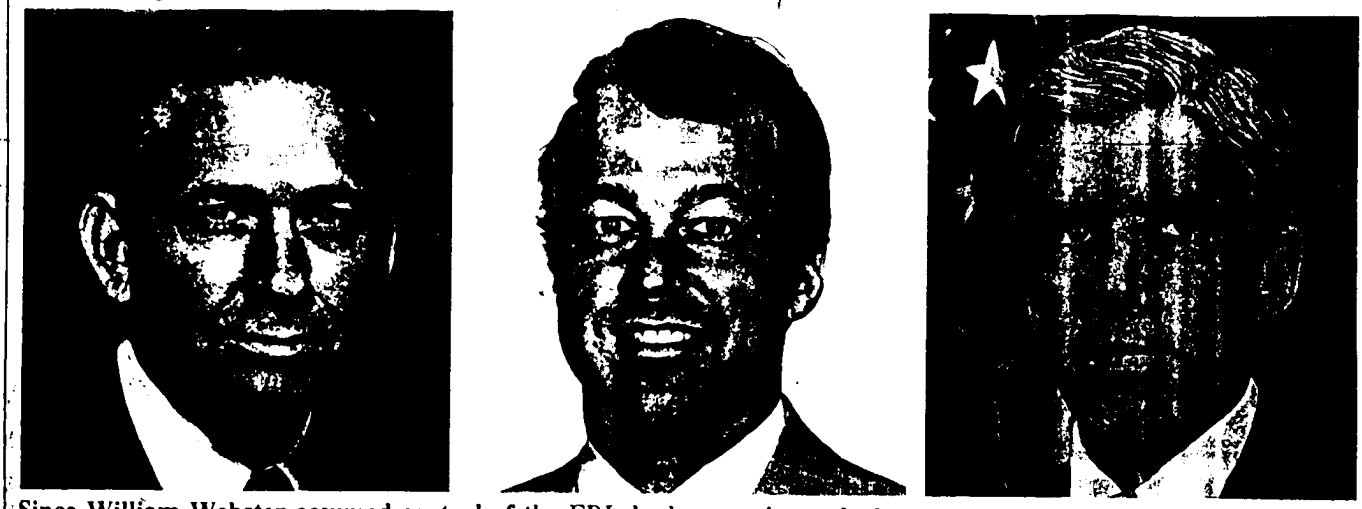
"If a pie is on the table and everybody's got a knife and fork, Bill is not going to take a back seat. He will be polite, of course, but he will get his share of the pie."

Webster quickly proved he was capable of getting his share of the pie here. He rebuilt the FBI far more successfully than had his predecessors in the 1970s—Clarence Kelley, William Ruckleshaus, and L. Patrick Gray III. (Gray was indicted for approving illegal break-ins when he was acting director in 1972-73. Charges were later dropped for lack of evidence.)

Unlike Hoover, Webster did not rebuild the FBI by playing to a national audience. The judge avoided the theatrics that had prompted former senator George Norris of Nebraska to brand Hoover "the greatest publicity hound on the American continent."

Beginning in the late 1930s, Hoover put together a public-relations machine that made certain that all of the FBI's successes were attributed to the Director's personal vigilance. Hoover led carefully staged raids on the hideouts of gangsters and racketeers. He developed a friendly stable of writers who fed FBI-approved stories to magazines, movies, radio shows, even comic books. An official FBI photograph of Hoover in 1944 carried this caption: "Tough and looks it, is Mr. J. Edgar Hoover. . . . This stockily built chief has a sensational record for bringing public enemies of all kinds . . . to justice. Mr. Hoover is the hero of all American schoolboys."

When Webster came to Washington, he chose not to be a hero. "There was a conscious effort on Webster's part to keep the FBI publicity mechanism from deifying him," recalls Russell J. Bruemmer, a law clerk to Webster in St. Louis who came to the FBI as a special assistant to the director. Webster warned the FBI press office not to tell reporters that his



Since William Webster assumed control of the FBI, he has run it much the way a corporate president would. He named three executive assistant directors who function as branch vice-presidents, guiding the operations of the 20,000-member police bureaucracy. The two current executive directors are Lee Colwell (left) and John Otto (middle). Francis "Bud" Mullen (right) left his FBI position last year to become administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Because the DEA is now controlled by the FBI, Mullen continues to report, via a hot line, to Webster.

favorite dessert was apple pie. (Hoover had publicized his taste for Key-lime pie.)

Webster changed the time-honored FBI practice of using an Autopen to sign the director's signature to thousands of routine documents. He delegated authority like a corporate chief executive officer, giving power to three executive assistant directors who operate as group vice presidents for administration, law enforcement, and investigation. Although he is far more accessible to Congress and the press than Hoover ever was, Webster never speaks out of school. He talks slowly, seeming to examine the implications of each word. His public statements are invariably balanced, often boring.

Webster's only venture into big-time image-making, the FBI-sanctioned ABC television show *Today's FBI*, was as balanced and boring as the director's speeches. In *G-Men*, a recent book about the FBI, social historian Richard Gid Powers says the agents of *Today's FBI* were "careful to explain, justify, and apologize for every move they made, as though there were a posse of ACLU lawyers, PTA fuss-budgets, and the editorial board of *The Nation* lurking just out of camera range, ready to push the 'abort' button the first time an agent bumped into the Bill of Rights." The show was canceled after one season because of low ratings.

Webster has attained his goal of not becoming a national celebrity. His FBI, according to Powers, has an image in the popular culture that has evolved beyond Hoover's G-men and the black-bag thugs of the '70s. That new image, says Powers, "is a washed-out nothing."

Webster told me that a lower profile for the FBI "is consistent with a long-term approach to doing our best work. A pattern had developed over 48 years of focusing on the director. . . . I think there is more potential for the director to damage the FBI by his own public actions than there is for him to enhance it.

"When I sit down with you, I'd like to think I've earned the right to be believed. You are not sitting there saying, 'Is he lying to me?' I don't think hero-making, in the long run, will serve that purpose."

The director's emergence as a non-hero may have washed the color out of the FBI's public image, but it has not kept Webster from building and consolidating power. Herbert Kaufman, a former senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and author of a study of the administrative behavior of federal bureau chiefs, says strong connections in Washington are far more important in running a bureaucracy than is a national constituency. "The visibility thing," says Kaufman, "is somewhat overdone."

On a level that is usually invisible, Webster has proved himself a master at the bureaucratic game. Taking advantage of a mandatory 55-and-out retirement rule that forced 800 agents to leave the FBI the month he arrived, Webster began installing younger agents in high-level positions. Within a few years, nearly every senior official in Bureau headquarters and in the 59 field offices was a Webster appointee whose loyalty was to the current director, not to the past.

Unlike his friend Stansfield Turner, who bloodily cut 154 senior employees out of the CIA and precipitated a much-publicized collapse in spy morale, Webster was careful not to arouse the ire of the career agents who make the FBI one of the federal government's most insular bureaucracies. Webster did not demote older agents, and, according to his former special assistant Bruemmer, he never denigrated them, even among intimates. The judge simply waited for them to retire—as about 43 percent of them have.

In the meantime, Webster enthusiastically paid homage to the FBI's sacred cows. He never misses the annual meeting of the 8,000-member Society of Former Special Agents. Last year at their meeting in Denver, he gave the retired agents, many of whom have important contacts with law-enforcement and political leaders around the country, a glowing report on what he called "our FBI family." Like Hoover, Webster attends quarterly graduation ceremonies at the FBI National Academy at Quantico, Virginia, where each year 1,000 police officers from around the country are taught how to fight crime the FBI way. Webster often tours FBI field offices; in Washington, he poses for pictures with visiting field agents. He attends funerals of agents killed in the line of duty and personally comforts their widows.

Outside the FBI bureaucracy, Webster has been equally diligent in touching all the power bases. He repeatedly has referred to the attorney general as his boss, something Hoover was loath to do. Webster makes a point of inviting FBI critics to lunch. Navasky, the editor of *The Nation*, has lunched with Webster, as has Jerry Berman of the ACLU. After Abscam, when the National Association of Arab Americans objected to FBI undercover agents posing as Arab sheiks, Webster invited members of the group to voice their complaints in his office.

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The site of most of his bridge-building is the FBI executive dining room, located about 30 feet down the hall from Webster's imposingly large office on the seventh floor of the FBI building. After arriving at work at 8:30 AM, Webster breakfasts there nearly every morning. He lunches there about three times a week. About half of the meals are given over to "outsiders"; the rest are briefing sessions with FBI executives.

Most important, Webster has developed a rapport with members of Congress, who have come to trust his judgment and believe his words. Unlike Hoover, who usually made one Capitol Hill appearance a year (before a doting House Appropriations subcommittee that served up puffball questions), Webster testifies before Congress at least eight times a year, and the questions are often critical.

"When Hoover was alive, you got nothing. There were no hearings, and everybody [in Congress] was afraid of him," says Representative Edwards. "Webster has been forthright, an honest administrator . . . a cool head."

The judge came to Washington determined to be believable. "What I brought with me, I think, was the benefit of the doubt," says Webster. "From then on, it was up to me to never do anything to cause people to wonder." According to Russell Bruemmer, the director's former aide and close friend, "Webster sensed that his credibility and integrity before Congress were the two things that could buy him time to prove he could run the Bureau."

Five months after Webster came to Washington, his signature was affixed, with an Autopen, to a letter that was glaringly false. That letter was sent to then-representative Paul McCloskey, a liberal Republican from California. McCloskey had asked Webster if a former Black Panther leader named Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt had been the target of the FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) at the time of a 1968 murder in Santa Monica, a killing for which Pratt had been convicted and was serving life in prison. Webster's letter said flatly, "You may be assured that Pratt was never a target of the FBI's COINTELPRO."

FBI documents proved otherwise. The documents, obtained by Pratt's lawyers under the Freedom of Information Act, said the Bureau had a plan to publicize Pratt's "illicit sexual activities" and to "attack, expose, and ridicule the image of [Pratt] amongst current and past mem-

bership" of the Black Panthers.

McCloskey, having seen these documents, wrote back to the director, cited evidence that the earlier Webster letter had ignored, and accused the FBI of "acting defensively." McCloskey, who now practices law in Palo Alto, recalls he was astonished at Webster's reaction.

"By God, he called me back in 24 hours. He ordered an immediate investigation. Within a week, I was invited to a meeting with Webster and his staff," says McCloskey. "Any leader is not going to say, 'My staff has lied to me.' But it was quite clear from the way he gave instructions in the meeting that he knew they had not told him the truth. They came back with a much more detailed report, conceding they had targeted Pratt."

Recalling the incident, Webster says he was angry at his subordinates for not doing their "homework." He feared the error would damage the credibility on which he hoped to rebuild the FBI. Webster often invokes the Pratt affair, aides say, to demand that documents prepared for his signature be checked for accuracy. "Being a straight arrow," says former FBI special assistant Steve Andrews, "is very important to the judge."

To remain a straight arrow at an agency that has sullied the reputation of previous directors, Webster has relied on his experience as a judge. For more than six years, he has hired temporary "special assistants"—young lawyers, most of them former clerks to federal judges—to sniff around the Bureau. Reporting only to him, they annotate sources for speeches, review applications for wiretaps, and assess progress of undercover investigations. While they are resented by FBI career bureaucrats, they have been useful. It was a special assistant, for example, who handled the Pratt foul-up.

Even his critics say Webster thinks like a judge. He monitors federal court rulings around the country and orders FBI agents to modify their behavior according to the most recent decisions. "He is a judge in a bureaucrat's role, a balancer who tries to weigh conflicting interests," says Jerry Berman of the ACLU. "He is politically tuned to both the right and left, and he manages to walk a very bright white line down the middle of the road."

For all his judicial finickiness, Webster's tenure at the FBI has been marked by several errors of judgment and major investigative failures. These failings, according to congressional staffers who keep tabs on the FBI, have occurred, in part, because Webster is too much the judge and not enough of an expert on how to control undercover operations.

In Abscam, in which undercover agents offered bribes to lawmakers in exchange for favors, a Senate select committee found that the FBI kept sloppy records of tapes and phone conversations, had poor reporting from the field to headquarters on what was going on, and gave convicted con man and middleman Mel Weinberg too much latitude in directing the operation. While appeals courts have upheld all seven convictions of congressmen who accepted Abscam bribes, Webster has admitted that the FBI could have done a better job. "I wish now we had more documentation," he said in 1982. "But [we] always improve on the next operation."

Not always. Two years after Abscam, the collapse of an undercover operation in Cleveland showed that the FBI under Webster can be farcically incompetent. In "Operation Corkscrew," the idea was to uncover corrupt judges in Cleveland's municipal court. The investigation was built around a middleman named Marvin Bray, a court bailiff who was supposed to be offering FBI bribe money to judges

"It's too bad you can't stay longer, Senator . . . but I know you have a prior commitment!"

but was instead pocketing the money and taking the Bureau for a ride.

The FBI made it easy for Bray. Cleveland agents working with the bailiff failed to make a routine computer check to see if he had a criminal record. He did, for burglary. An FBI undercover agent, who met with two "judges" whom Bray claimed to have bribed, did not check to see if they were, in fact, judges. They were not. One was a bailiff, the other a housewife. To spot the ringers, the agent would only have had to walk into the courtrooms of the real judges and look at them.

Throughout Corkscrew, the FBI demonstrated a stubborn refusal to believe that Bray was a liar. Even after the FBI figured out that Bray had forged signatures and staged a taped conversation—with Bray playing the roles of both briber and judge—he was sent out to bribe another judge. The only indictments to come out of Corkscrew were against Bray and his make-believe judges.

Webster says that the problem with the operation "was simply this: A young agent failed to do what he was instructed to do. . . . Corkscrew is unfortunate, but it doesn't represent something wrong with undercover work."

Operation Corkscrew *does* represent something wrong with the way the Bureau supervises undercover operations, according to Representative Edwards, whose Judiciary subcommittee reviewed the entire 28,000-page FBI file. "The Bureau didn't have the proper safeguards in place. They thought they were supervising, but they weren't," says Edwards. The subcommittee found that the FBI's undercover review committee (which Webster points to as a centerpiece of the Bureau's ability to control undercover operations) had almost no role in controlling Corkscrew. The review committee gave six-month approval for the operation in late 1979 but did not meet to discuss the operation again for a year. The subcommittee found no documents suggesting that the FBI supervisor in Washington, who was responsible for Corkscrew, had criticized the operation. "It was a case of Abscamitis. There never was any solid evidence indicating the judges were corrupt," says one senior congressional staffer who is familiar with Corkscrew. "Webster believes that the undercover review committee has an important role. He thinks that because he has guidelines and procedures, everything will be all right. But in Corkscrew, it didn't filter down."

Webster himself is partially to blame for the Cleveland fiasco, Edwards asserts, because the director "did not go beneath the surface on what the facts were."

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BYLINE: Reviewed by Peter Braestrup, a former editor of The Wilson Quarterly and currently a consultant to the Librarian of Congress

BODY:

Four Stars

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Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American
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Houghton Mifflin, 420 pages, $24.95

Even if - a big if - the Cold War is over, it behooves us to begin to understand how America's political and military leaders have tried to contain Communist advances around the world since 1945, at great cost in lives and treasure.

On the face of it, both Mark Perry's "Four Stars" - a 40-year chronicle of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top U. S. military command - and Cecil Currey's portrait of the late Gen. Edward Lansdale, the maverick American counter-insurgency guru in Southeast Asia, should shed new light on the triumphs and follies of U. S. Cold War policies. Unhappily neither author is up to his subject.

"Four Stars" makes the larger claim. The publisher bills it as a "compelling work of history," certain to inspire "a major reassessment of the military's role in a free society." And, indeed, the Joint Chiefs are important.

The uniformed heads of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, with a four-star chairman picked by the president and a joint staff, the chiefs propose both budgets and strategy to the Defense Secretary and the White House. They carry out the president's orders as commander-in-chief under the Constitution. Since 1947, in war and peace, the chiefs have contended with their own inter-service rivalries, Pentagon red tape, Congressional pressures and White House politics.

For 40 years, as author Perry notes, the chiefs have sought a greater voice in shaping U. S. foreign policy - because it is "their people," the men in combat, who pay the price for civilians' mistakes, as they did in Vietnam from 1965 to 1973 and Beirut in 1983.

[redacted] he focuses on military personalities (Omar Bradley, Maxwell Taylor, Earl Wheeler), skips lightly over complex issues of budget-making and strategy (especially during Korea and Vietnam) and ignores some crucial historical accounts. [redacted]

Perry's major revelation concerns an alleged near-rebellion by the Joint Chiefs during the Vietnam conflict. On August 25, 1967, we are told, Gen. Earl Wheeler, the JCS chairman, finally became fed up with President Lyndon Johnson's refusal to heed the military's pleas for a mobilization of the reserves and a decisive strategy to win the war. Secretly summoning the chiefs to his office, he told them he thought the entire JCS should resign in protest at a Pentagon press conference next morning - and explain why. They agreed.

But by next morning, says Perry, Wheeler had changed his mind. He summoned his JCS colleagues again. "We can't do it," he told them. "It's mutiny." That was that. All involved pledged secrecy.

Perry cites only one anonymous source - a "retired former JCS flag rank (staff) officer" - for that vivid account, so this reviewer interrogated several authorities on the JCS. Among them was historian Herbert Schandler, author of "Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam" and one of the authors of the "Pentagon Papers." Schandler, who had interviewed Wheeler (now dead), cast doubt on Perry's tale. Wheeler, he said, always hoped that LBJ could be persuaded to mobilize the nation for the Vietnam War. And Gen. Wallace Greene, commandant of the Marine Corps at the time, told me that if such a near-mutiny had occurred in August, 1967, he would have been in on it, and he could recall no such drama.

[redacted]

Cecil Currey's biography of Edward Lansdale, enshrined in fiction as Eugene Burdick's "Ugly American" and Graham Greene's "Quiet American," suffers from different flaws - most of them the result of the author's unfamiliarity with Lansdale's old stamping grounds in Southeast Asia.

Under the pseudonym "Cincinnatus," Currey, a Florida history professor, wrote "Self-Destruct" (1981), a widely publicized analysis of the U. S. Army's travails in Vietnam. At the time, his publisher, W. W. Norton, intimated that "Cincinnatus" was a Vietnam combat veteran; in fact, Currey was a chaplain in the Army Reserve and had never been to Indochina.

That gap in Currey's background, among others, weakens his grasp of U. S. counter-insurgency efforts in the Philippines against the Communist Hukbalahap or Huks in 1950-53 and in South Vietnam in 1954-57 and 1966-68. Instead we have what often amounts to a long home movie in print - an exhaustive account of Lansdale's daily doings (and opinions) based heavily on the general's voluminous correspondence.

The son of a peripatetic automobile executive, Lansdale wound up on the West Coast when World War II began, a UCLA graduate working in a San Francisco advertising agency. He got into the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the CIA, but spent little time overseas. His first real opportunity to shine came during the early 1950s when, as an Air Force officer working for U. S.

Intelligence in Manila, he was assigned to help Defense Minister Ramon Magsaysay fight the Communist insurgents and, later, to win the Philippine presidency.

Land reform, people-to-people politics, honest elections - all these became part of Magsaysay's successful "hearts and minds" approach. The Huks gradually faded. Lansdale, no shrinking violet, got much of the credit.

But the "hearts and minds" approach did not fare so well in South Vietnam, where Lansdale worked hard to help save the shaky post-colonial regime of Ngo Dinh Diem from 1954-57. Indeed, when Lansdale returned to Saigon in the mid-1960s, the time had probably passed when psychological warfare could win the day unaided.

Having launched the Vietcong insurgency against Diem, Hanoi was now sending regiments of regular troops down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to "liberate" the South from Diem's successors and their American allies. Neither Lansdale nor Currey seems to have understood the changing character of the Vietnam War. By mid-1968, frustrated and worn out, Lansdale went into semi-retirement in McLean, Va.

To both Currey and Lansdale, those who disagreed with the general - especially those in the U. S. military - were "myopic" or worse. Yet the reader gets only a cloudy picture of the larger events in which Lansdale was playing a minor, if much-publicized, role.

Currey does make one thing clear: Lansdale, the ex-advertising man turned "psy-warrior," had a knack, rare among Americans, for making friends with Asians. He liked and respected them, despite the language barrier, and they reciprocated. Perhaps the best appraisal of Lansdale comes from William E. Colby, former CIA director and an old Vietnam hand: "Some of his ideas were mistakes, but most were not, a pretty good record for any man."

GRAPHIC: PHOTO: The late Gen. Edward Lansdale (above) served as a model for Graham Greene's "Quiet American." Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Earle Wheeler (right) receives a medal from President Johnson.

TERMS: BOOK; REVIEW

The Washington Post

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Book World

The High Command

FOUR STARS
By Mark Perry
Houghton Mifflin. 412 pp. $24.95

By Bob Woodward

THOSE FOLLOWING or perplexed about the trial of former National Security Council aide Oliver North would do well to read Mark Perry's *Four Stars*, an important study of America's military high command, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and excellent companion reading to the daily news stories of North's exploits in the making of U.S foreign policy.

One of the fundamental questions hanging over the trial and the entire Iran-contra affair is how a mere lieutenant colonel could exert such influence in the highest councils of government. The answer may lie in Perry's persuasively argued account of an American high command that, since World War II, has had no adequate role in the formation of foreign policy. To put the problem another way: Since 1942, when the JCS were created to plan wartime strategy, no president has devised a satisfactory way of channeling military advice into the apparatus of decision-making on national security.

The author perhaps exaggerates the extent to which the Joint Chiefs (the Army and Air Force chiefs of staff, the chief of naval operations, the Marine Corps commandant, a chairman and since 1986 a vice chairman) over the years have grasped at such a role. Deference to civilian authority is a first principle with most of the senior military officers I have encountered. Still, Perry recounts several important episodes in which members of the JCS sought, and in most cases failed to achieve, power of the sort Oliver North wielded in his heyday. In the process, he brings to life a body whose inner workings are as mysterious to most Americans as those of the College of Cardinals and takes the reader on a fact-packed, high-speed tour of a near half-century of political and military history. Perry shows the Korean War, the Bay of Pigs invasion, Vietnam, the failed hostage rescue mission in Iran and the Grenada invasion from inside the Pentagon, and at times he gets inside the "tank" conference room in which the chiefs hold their closed-door meetings thrice weekly.

Perry's most dramatic example is his description of the debates within the JCS on the Vietnam War. He demonstrates how that unpopular war pulled relentlessly at the very fabric of the military, and adds significant new information about the JCS' role.

"The most significant incident in the JCS's existence," he writes, "occurred in August 1967, when the entire U.S. high command threatened to resign over the civilian handling of the Vietnam conflict . . . Everything that occurred in the twenty years before 1967 made the crisis inevitable; everything that occurred afterward made military reorganization, the end of this forty-year history, essential."

The then JCS chairman, Army Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, objecting to certain civilian decisions about Vietnam, proposed that the chiefs call a press conference and resign *en masse*. The next day Wheeler reversed himself, declaring privately to his fellow four-star officers, "We can't do it. It's mutiny . . . If we resign they'll just get someone else . . . and they'll do what they're told."

Perry's portraits of individual chiefs are firmly grounded in the peculiar bureaucratic culture of the Department of Defense, with its fierce service loyalties and rivalries. The chiefs, by turns autocratic, conniving, ideological, generous, foolish and wise, have defined the JCS through force of personality. *Four Stars* impatiently marches the reader past some of these portraits—including those of giants like Douglas MacArthur and Matthew Ridgway—a bit too quickly. But the book's ambitious goal of telling the whole story of the JCS, from its inception to the present, excuses the hurried pace.

[redacted] and journalistic methods, including both confidential sources and on-the-record interviews, the author wrenches the chiefs from their often self-imposed obscurity.

Proceeding chronologically, Perry attempts to unify his story by identifying a trend toward greater influence and authority for the JCS. The culmination is the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, the law by which Congress strengthened the JCS. The institution had been crippled for decades by the requirement that the chiefs speak with one voice, which inevitably resulted in bland con-

the principal military adviser to the president, free to offer advice undiluted by interservice logrolling.

Perry overdraws somewhat his picture of the pre-reform chiefs as a committee of so many Hamlets, plagued with doubt about their role in our constitutional system. But he furnishes memorable descriptions of top officers who were perceived by others, or even themselves, as weak. During the Vietnam War, for example, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Harold K. Johnson had himself driven to the White House to confront President Johnson and resign. On the way, Perry tells us, the general even unpinned his stars, but he backed down at the last moment, only to regret it later: "I should have resigned," he reportedly said, "It was the worst, the most immoral decision I've ever made."

More recently, Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle, after getting the JCS to knuckle under to a particular arms control position, declared that the chiefs were "pushovers and patsies for whoever leans on them the last, the longest, and the hardest."

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Les Aspin asked several years ago, "Has anyone seen the JCS lately? Does anyone know what happened to them? Where did they go, anyway?"

The 1986 reforms have given the chairman of the JCS more clout and a more responsive organization. Perry argues that the current chairman, Adm. William J. Crowe Jr., has increased the stature of his office. Under such circumstances, it seems that the system at last is capable of providing useful military advice to the White House. But as Perry notes at the end, there is "a sobering thought: the true test of military reform will come not in peace, but in war."

It is worth remembering, however, that the modern U.S. military exists not so much to fight wars as to deter them. The best measure of its success, then, may be its ability to lend its unique experience and advice to the formulation of national-security policy. Having given the high command new influence in policy, reformers may have closed the void exploited by a zealous lieutenant colonel. But it remains to be seen how our top military leaders can sell their programs and skills as diplomats and advisers to the White House, which is traditionally suspicious of Pentagon brass and more attuned to domestic politics. ■

Bob Woodward, an assistant managing editor of The Washington Post, is the author, [illegible] *of*

FEBRUARY 1967

COVER STORY

THE

THE NEVER-BEFORE-TOLD

SECRET

STORY OF WILLIAM BUCKLEY'S EXHAUSTIVE

LIFE

CIA TRAINING, HIS WAR OF

OF AN

TERROR IN VIETNAM, AND HIS BRUTAL

AMERICAN

TORTURE AND DEATH IN BEIRUT.

SPY

PHOTO BY ERICA FREUDENSTIEN

On the morning of March 16, 1984 America's most important intelligence asset in the Middle East followed his usual regimen: he exercised, made a pot of coffee, ate a solitary breakfast, scanned some reports, and packed his briefcase. Then he watched and waited.

One view from William Buckley's living room on the 10th floor of the Al-Manara apartments in West Beirut looked out on the Mediterranean; the other looked out on the hazy panorama of the Chouf Mountains. It was a beautiful dawn over Lebanon, the kind of morning that could make anyone forget that just miles away warring militias were battling for control of Beirut's back alleys, as they'd done for nearly 10 years. Buckley eyed the street below, looking for any unusual movements, a sign that he was being watched. He scanned the coast road that he'd drive along to the British compound, where American interests in Lebanon were housed. The compound was only a half mile from the apartment complex, but Buckley wasn't a spy who took chances. He watched and waited for several minutes, then picked up his briefcase and walked down the 10 flights of stairs to the street below.

Thousands of miles to the west, at the Central Intelligence Agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia, other CIA operatives were engaged in other rituals. Deep in the bowels of the world's most renowned intelligence agency, communications specialists manned the encryption and decoding machines that are the heart of the network of electronic eyes and ears that ties the Agency to its agents in the field. Buckley's messages were among the most important cables that came through the communications center; they were tagged TOP SECRET and sent immediately to the seventh floor, to William Casey, the director of central intelligence. The communications center was comparatively quiet on March 16, 1984; the inbound traffic consisted of standard intelligence reports from outposts as far-flung as Mombassa and Bangkok. With the exception of a nasty little war that was secretly being fought in Central America, the United States was at peace.

Buckley waited a few minutes before he got in his car. He was patient, his deliberation reflecting three decades of icy caution. His purposeful manner was his trademark, the thing that had helped to make him one of the CIA's most successful agents. When others showed fear, Buckley became almost overly relaxed. He dropped his briefcase onto the seat beside him and began his trip along the coast road.

It was, in a sense, Buckley's last ride. Within moments a Renault had pulled out of an alley ahead of him and coughed out three armed masked gunmen. No warnings were necessary, no words were spoken; Buckley was outmanned, outgunned, and clearly outwitted. He was dragged from his automobile and shoved into the Renault, which sped away along the coast road and into Beirut, its trail lost among the grim ruins of the city's decimated Moslem and Christian neighborhoods.

The kidnapping was thoroughly professional. Buckley had been disarmed, his radio had been smashed, his tires had been blown—all in less than 15 seconds. It was clear that his movements had been closely monitored. His kidnappers knew who he was, where he lived, and, most important, how he was protected. By the time his colleagues realized that he'd vanished, all traces of him were gone, the trail obliterated by the labyrinth of blood that characterized Beirut.

"I was just overwhelmed," says Chip Beck, a State Department employee who served with Buckley in Beirut. "I tried to go through how it might have happened. I was back here [in the United States], and I just couldn't fathom it. I had a hard time emotionally."

Beck wasn't the only one who was stunned by the kidnapping. At a high-level, early morning meeting, an ashen and enraged William Casey demanded that the Agency's top counterterrorism expert be immediately located and rescued. "Find him!" he screamed in frustration. "*Find him!*"

No expense was to be spared, no stone was to be left unturned. Everything was at stake for the CIA, particularly the morale of every agent in every part of the world. Casey knew, perhaps better than anyone else at Langley, that the kid-

The Life And Times Of William Buckley

May 31, 1928 *Buckley is born to middle-class parents in Medford, Massachusetts. He becomes an avid reader at a young age; later his interests turn almost exclusively to politics and history.*

June 1, 1945 *Buckley enlists in the army, but the war ends before he can fulfill a longtime dream: to serve in combat. He calls his enlistment a mistake.*

September 1947 *His two-year hitch in the army ended, Buckley enrolls in Boston University's liberal arts program. He excels as a student, friends say.*

June 25, 1950 *The Korean War begins.*

June 1951 *Buckley reenlists in the army. He's commissioned as a second lieutenant in the infantry.*

September 1951 *Buckley arrives in South Korea (on September 10, according to CIA colleagues) and leads a platoon in the U.S. drive up the Korean peninsula. His unit engages Chinese Communist troops in brutal battles on Korea's desolate, frozen mountains. He is 23.*

ALL PHOTOS IN THE TIME LINE, UNLESS OTHERWISE LABELED, SUPPLIED BY BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS

1962: BUCKLEY LEADS A GREEN BERET UNIT in Boston's Memorial Day parade. The CIA, which was being pressured to train counterinsurgency experts, had sent him to Fort Bragg to work with the Special Forces. He was part of a new generation of warriors who would battle Third World rebels.

...pping of a CIA agent anywhere threatened CIA agents everywhere; secrets might be revealed, identities might be disclosed. They were all watching to see what their employer would do to get Buckley back, silently measuring their own chances of survival by Buckley's fate. If Casey couldn't rescue his friend, a man whom he'd come to trust implicitly during his short time as the head the CIA, then no agent was safe.

Buckley's kidnapping represented the worst kind of horror for the few agents who'd served with him in assignments all over the world throughout three decades. They pleaded for radical action to win his release, noting that the Agency had failed before in crises such as this. Most poignantly, they remembered the fate of ne of Buckley's closest friends, Tucker Gouglemann, an agent who'd been stranded in Saigon after it was conquered by the North Vietnamese. Despite the danger, Gouglemann had traveled to Saigon to search for his Vietnamese wife and child, a lone romantic American adrift in a confused Oriental sea. Buckley had monitored Gouglemann's movements and had vainly attempted to reach him by a secure communications link, but his effort had been futile. Within days Gouglemann had been arrested. Within weeks he'd been shipped to a prison camp. Within months he was dead.

When Gouglemann was captured, CIA operatives had rushed to spark the Agency to life. Meetings had been held and promises made, but in the end, they felt, little had been done to win his release. Eighteen months after he disappeared, his body was turned over to the Americans. His captors had shown no mercy: virtually every bone in his body had been expertly and brutally broken.

Buckley never forgot Gouglemann, was never dissuaded from his belief that the Agency could have done more but didn't. Gouglemann's life, Buckley believed, had been forfeited by callous bureaucrats; he'd been quickly and quietly forgotten by people who'd never worked in the field, who'd never known the face of fear.

Like Buckley, Gouglemann had been a top intelligence agent. But unlike Buckley, he'd been well liked, even loved, by dozens of Agency hands. Buckley may have been prescient, or perhaps he realized that his aloofness had offended too many of his colleagues and made him too many enemies. And perhaps he understood that his assignment to Beirut—a city in which he'd been identified as a CIA agent—amounted to a virtual death sentence.

"Don't let that happen to me," Buckley told a friend just weeks before he was kidnapped. "Don't let what happened to Gouglemann happen to me."

Some CIA hands believe that what happened to Gouglemann happened to Buckley. The CIA would deny it, of course. It would contend that it turned the Middle East upside down looking for him. Just look at the evidence: the Intelligence Support Activity, the secret army intelligence group that Buckley had helped to establish, sprang into action. The National Security Agency ran intercepts on everything that moved in Beirut. Even the DEA was brought into the case, on the odd chance that a drug dealer somewhere in Lebanon knew something about Buckley's fate.

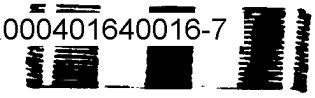
But agents who have a less charitable view of the CIA's search for Buckley repeat the dark mutterings that made the rounds of bars and hangouts in Northern Virginia in the days after the kidnapping.

"Look for Buckley?" an agent asks, his whisper revealing a barely audible laugh. He raises his eyebrows conspiratorially. "Why, sure we looked for Buckley. Why, we turned over every piece of paper in the CIA looking for that man."

What follows is the story of one of America's top spies, a spy whom many intelligence operatives believe was left out in the cold. It isn't a story that the U.S. intelligence community wants you to read. Nowhere in our government are secrets more closely kept than at the CIA. Its employees are prohibited from talking about their work and their colleagues, and its documents are kept under the deepest cover. But after a series of meetings over a period of many months, some former and current CIA agents were willing to talk about their friend. This report is a product of those conversations, as well as interviews with a number of U.S. intelligence officials and analysts; other information about Buckley was found in U.S. government documents and depositions.

The result is an unprecedented look at the secret life of an American spy, a soldier of misfortune whose career mirrored U.S. foreign policy after World War II. As a CIA agent, William Buckley was involved in the Bay of Pigs, in the bloodiest operations of the Vietnam War, and in sensitive missions to Egypt, Pakistan, and Lebanon. He was a fearless warrior, a skilled tactician, and an insatiable lover. His story exemplifies the best and worst about the CIA—often at the same time. ▸

Mark Perry *is a Washington writer whose articles have appeared in the* St. Louis Post-Dispatch, *the* International Herald Tribune, *the* London Guardian, Newsday, *and the* Washington Post. *He's the author of* Four Stars, *a history and investigation of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, which will be published by Houghton Mifflin Company in March.*



Early 1952 *Buckley is awarded a Silver Star, the army's medal for gallantry, for single-handedly capturing a North Korean machine-gun nest.*

Early 1953 *Buckley is promoted to captain. He earns two Purple Hearts for wounds received in battle.*

Early 1954 *Buckley is offered a job by the Central Intelligence Agency.*

Mid 1954 *Buckley completes the Agency's three-day exam and its preliminary training and receives course instruction. He's dispatched to Fayetteville, North Carolina for schooling in psychological operations.*

Early 1955 *Buckley receives his degree from Boston University.*

February 1956 *Buckley begins a tour at the CIA's headquarters in Langley, Virginia as an intelligence analyst. He's pressed into service as a result of the Agency's Berlin tunnel crisis.*

Mid or late 1958 *According to a CIA contract analyst, Buckley is given field training at a CIA station in Europe, probably as part of a team of political analysts who are assigned to the U.S. embassy in Bonn; the report cannot be confirmed. Other*

reports say that Buckley is dispatched as an adviser to Vientiane, Laos, where he serves in an unofficial capacity with the U.S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group; these reports also cannot be confirmed.

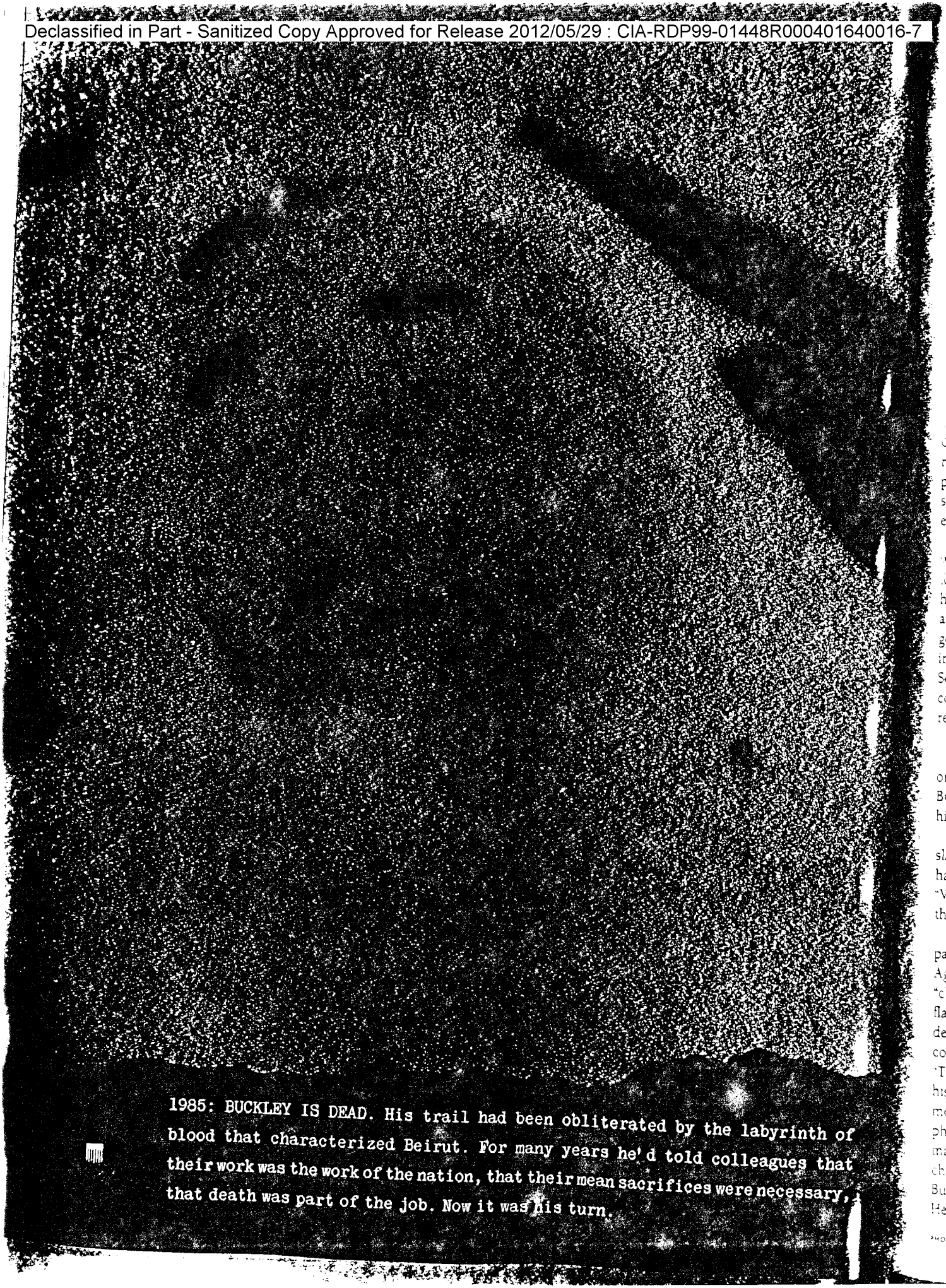
1960 and early 1961 *Buckley spends much of his time in Florida as one of the trainers for the CIA's Cuba Brigade, which was created to help overthrow Fidel Castro's government. When the brigade's invasion of the Bay of Pigs fails, he's reassigned to Langley. Buckley is bitter about the invasion, for he believes that it might have succeeded with proper support from the bureaucrats in the White House.*

1962 and 1963 *In Fayetteville, Buckley trains U.S. Special Forces units (Green Berets) for service in Vietnam. He's one of the few top CIA officers who has received counterinsurgency and counterterrorism training.*

Late 1963 *According to friends, Buckley is a key early adviser to the Special Forces in Vietnam. Working out of the CIA's office in Cholon,*

1981: BUCKLEY IN CAIRO, training Anwar Sadat's bodyguards. Before long Buckley sounds an alarm: Sadat's in grave danger.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM GRALISH



1985: BUCKLEY IS DEAD. His trail had been obliterated by the labyrinth of blood that characterized Beirut. For many years he'd told colleagues that their work was the work of the nation, that their mean sacrifices were necessary, that death was part of the job. Now it was his turn.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MAKING OF A SPY

No one at the CIA likes to talk about William Buckley. The CIA agent who was tortured to delirium and death by his Hezbollah captors is one of the Agency's best-kept secrets. It's damned eerie, almost as if those who guard the nation's deepest secrets have stamped Buckley's life EYES ONLY. Questions about America's top counterterrorism operative are met with palpable silence: phones go dead, conversations stop in midsentence, smiles are wiped clean from weathered faces.

Here is all the Company will say: Buckley worked in Beirut in 1984 as a political analyst for the State Department. He was kidnapped, held incommunicado, interrogated, tortured, and later died in captivity. The CIA tried to get him back but couldn't. His name came up in the depositions given by CIA officials to Senate and House investigators during the Iran-contra hearings and in numerous newspaper reports.

Everything else is either unknown or secret.

"I don't want to talk about Buckley," says one of the few retired CIA analysts who called Buckley a friend. "What can you say about him?"

The analyst, who's leaning over a bar in McLean, slaps his knee, swivels on his stool, and gives a half smile. "Maybe you haven't heard," he says. "William Buckley met the bear. He was gotten by the getters."

In intelligence parlance, the shorthand that passes for discourse among the elite group of Agency operatives who work the field, Buckley "checked out," "squared the circle," "kissed the flag," or, worse yet, "did not rise again from the dead." William Corson, a retired U.S. Marine colonel and intelligence analyst, puts it this way: "This is a dog that won't smile, that doesn't wag his tail, that isn't warm at night." He pauses for a moment, then his bitter voice wheezes over the phone. "Let me speak American," he says. "This man died and shouldn't have. God loves little children, drunks, and the good ol' U.S. of A. But that sure as hell didn't help Bill Buckley." He laughs, but only for a moment, before going on: "You stay away from this one. William Buckley is dead."

Some of Buckley's enemies blame him for the Iran-contra scandal. If he hadn't gone off and gotten himself kidnapped, they say, the Agency wouldn't have had to put up with the likes of Oliver North and Manucher Ghorbanifar on its public record and wouldn't have contributed to a new blot on the Republic's blemished history. They say that Buckley needn't have gone to that stink hole, Beirut. ("It's not even a part of the goddamned planet," one says.) He could have taken an assignment in a quieter part of the world; he might have gone, they say, to Saudi Arabia, "the big sandbox."

There's sick humor in all this, a bitter offhandedness that intelligence agents substitute for drunken wakes. But the urge to blame Buckley for "getting himself involved with those Hezbollah fellas" belies the paralyzing chill that came over the Agency in the weeks that followed his kidnapping. Eventually a tape that showed Buckley being tortured bobbed to the surface and was served up to the CIA's analysts with sad reluctance by Casey. Later Casey took it to President Reagan, and after an anguished silence the two spent their emotions.

The president's viewing seems to have closed the book on Buckley. Through grim wars on lonely battlefields and in little-known intelligence skirmishes from Europe to the Far East, he'd been one of the Agency's best. Even his bitterest enemies had to agree: he and the CIA were made for each other.

EVEN AS A BOY, BUCKLEY SHOWED A PREdilection for international intrigue and a nose for the boiled-out simplicity of right and wrong. He was an avid newshound, a voracious reader, a burgeoning diplomat. He studied the intricacies of war and lectured his classmates on the poli-

a suburb of Saigon, he dispatches Green Beret units to help train Montagnard tribesmen in the Central Highlands.

1964 *Buckley asks for and receives a leave of absence from the CIA. He spends a year designing the diorama at the Lexington-Concord battlefield in Massachusetts. Friends say he also uses the leave to prepare for another tour in Vietnam; he receives detailed briefings on the war from Agency officials, who have made him a key element in their counterterrorism planning.*

Early 1965 *In Nha Trang, Vietnam, Buckley trains native units in counterinsurgency activities.*

Mid 1966 *Buckley earns a second Silver Star after he blows up Vietcong ammunition caches along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. His service in Vietnam is interrupted by a short assignment in Savannakhet, Laos, where he identifies communist agents for Laos's neutralist government.*

Late 1966 *Buckley conducts paramilitary operations against North Vietnamese army units in the northern part of South Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He is promoted to lieutenant colonel.*

1967 and 1968 *Buckley runs operations designed to expose North Vietnamese agents who are working undercover in South Vietnam. He becomes known as one of the CIA's best behind-the-lines agents.*

Mid 1969 *A team of Buckley's irregulars destroys three Vietcong munition bases in a legendary operation. Buckley's team eludes a large enemy contingent that's sent after it; later a Special Forces officer says that Buckley is lucky to have made it out alive. Buckley is promoted to colonel.*

Late 1969 *Buckley is appointed the head of Provincial Reconnaissance Units for South Vietnam, the*

PHOTOGRAPH (LEFT) BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS

ties of the American [illegible] as familiar with the turf of American politics at the age of 10 as most people are at the age of 30.

Buckley played elegant war games. On the floor of his room he moved line upon line of painted soldiers through drills, parades, and ceremonies. He spent hours moving the iron brigades into positions to crush enemies and win victories. For him it wasn't just play; it was practice for adulthood. The metal men died in smart, straight rows, mown down like wheat. Then he painstakingly resurrected them to fight again. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, he was 13.

Buckley wasn't at all like his middle-class parents; it was as if their genes had been skewed by some peculiar fate. His obsession with politics was purely personal; his father, a stockbroker, wasn't particularly interested in the subject. His mother raised him and his two sisters to respect authority, earn good grades, and love their country. The Buckleys were religious, but not devout; they were Roman Catholic exemplars of the Protestant ethic. They attended church at the proper times and sniffed after success and the elusive Dream as diligently as any other American family.

If anything, the lives of the Buckleys of Medford, Massachusetts were mildly soporific. Mom and Dad wanted their children to be exceptional, but not exceptionally well known. Buckley's father thought that a good business education, or even an education in the liberal arts, followed by a job as a stockbroker or corporate executive would suit his son just fine. He stood over his son as an example of the value of clean living. He taught him that a New England sense of self-abnegation coupled with a fervid belief in hard work and strict probity would lead to happiness. If all went as planned, young Bill would go to college, get a job, raise a family, and vote Republican. He'd be a patriot and a defender of the future that his father had helped to build. He'd manipulate portfolios, not people. When others sold, he'd buy. When the market was down, he'd be up. No one ever thought that he'd become a spy.

In June 1945 Buckley made his way to an army recruiting office and enlisted as a private. Later he reluctantly admitted that his patriotic act had been a mistake: he'd been born too late (on Memorial Day 1928) to serve in World War II. When Japan surrendered just two months after he enlisted, he recognized how ridiculous he'd been and realized that he should have gone to college. It was one of the few missteps he'd make in his life: he received two years of training in the art of soldiering without getting a chance to use it.

Buckley's friends see in his enlistment the seed of some of his later problems: he followed a plan [illegible] of what it cost. He was obsessed with order and clung to his decisions in the face of setbacks that would have undone most others. He finished his hitch in the army a chastened and unused soldier, then promptly enrolled as a liberal arts student at Boston University.

Four years later, when the Korean War began, Buckley got lucky. He was one of thousands of commissioned officers who'd lead their generation into the muck and muddle of Asia. Korea, he told his friends, was his chance to soldier.

Buckley's tour in Korea ensured his later employment with the CIA. "He was just damn brave," says Beck. "He won a Silver Star for valor in Korea when they weren't exactly handing them out."

Buckley also received two Purple Hearts. The first one came as a result of an injury he received when he single-handedly captured a North Korean squad. He'd destroyed a machine-gun nest and in a fit of rage and muscle had dared his enemies to kill him. He won his second Purple Heart after a dance with near-certain death. In the midst of a firefight on a frigid night he led his shattered platoon to safety. In the process he tore an enemy squad to bloody shreds and then walked among the dead and dying silently, as if he were a latter-day Patton.

Buckley was left wounded, tattered, frost-bitten, and hungry—but unshaken. He'd danced the Asian night away and lived to dance again. He'd proved that he had nerves of steel.

"He always knew what could and couldn't be done in a combat situation," Beck says. "But he scared people because he was so fearless."

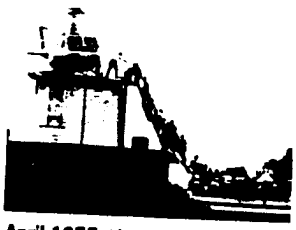
BUCKLEY EMERGED FROM KOREA WITH HIS life as a professional soldier mapped out in front of him. He could've climbed the career ladder to the Pentagon and a pension, perhaps picking up another war or two along the way. But the CIA had taken note of his record and identified him as a soldier with special talents. In 1954 it made Buckley an offer: if he would submit to a battery of tests and a tough regimen of special training, it would hire him as one of its agents. He was told to think over the offer carefully because the commitment was forever, but he didn't hesitate; within 24 hours he put his fate into the CIA's hands.

The Agency gave Buckley a test it calls an "assessment and evaluation"—its euphemism for a grueling 72-hour interrogation. In part (or so retired CIA employees say), the interrogation is designed to determine when a person would lie and what it would take to make him tell the truth. The crucible is especially useful for those whom the CIA is considering for work in the field as part of its covert operations directorate. The directorate is the Cadillac of institutional spying;

PRUs run the Phoenix program which is responsible for the "neutralization" of more than 50,000 Vietnamese political officials. Buckley works directly under the supervision of the CIA's station chief in Vietnam. Theodore Shackley

Mid 1972 or 1973 *Buckley is recalled to Langley; he's one of the last important American advisers to leave South Vietnam.*

1974 *Buckley and Chip Beck (above), a State Department employee, open an antique store in Manassas. Beck recalls Buckley: "He used to say, 'Give me all the little old ladies, the misfits and mavericks, those who others have given up on, and I'll accomplish great things.'"*



April 1975 *The North Vietnamese enter Saigon; the war in Vietnam ends.*

June 1975 *Buckley wages an internal Agency battle to get the United States to launch an immediate rescue of CIA agent Tucker Gouglemann, who remains in South Vietnam. Gouglemann is tortured and killed; Buckley believes that the Agency abandoned him. "Don't let that happen to me," Buckley later tells a friend. "Don't let what happened to Gouglemann happen to me."*

August 1978 *Buckley becomes the chief political officer of the U.S. embassy in Damascus, Syria. He is reportedly identified as a CIA agent by Syrian intelligence officials*

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it has its own traditions, its own unspoken customs. It's the Agency's most elite club. In the mid 1950s, in particular, it was a club that was difficult to join; you had to be asked, and you had to pass the initiation rite: the three days of mind games that certified that you were mentally fit enough to survive international insanity.

Buckley passed the first day's hurdles, which were basically medical tests, with no trouble. The tests on the second and third days were far more rigorous. These were psychological examinations that had been individually tailored to determine his potential weak points. The CIA especially wanted to know if the brutality of war had impaired his judgment. It wanted to discover how he'd survived Korea and whether he could do it again. The tests were meant to bring out the worst and the best in him, to trick and train him at the same time. The Agency didn't want killers or psychotics; it wanted men who knew exactly what they were doing and would do it anyway.

The three days of tests were only the beginning. Buckley was told that he still had to undergo a final examination that the CIA then referred to as a "technical interview." Put simply, a TI is a polygraph test, a struggle with a machine that maps canyons of lies and plains of truth. No one then or now can be employed by the CIA without taking a TI, including the director of central intelligence, and no one is steely enough to maintain a neat line of truth. Even those who fool themselves can't fool the needle. After taking the test, prospective employees sign a form that spells out their willingness to undergo future examinations. Anyone who fails a TI is dismissed, as is anyone who refuses to sign the form. Anyone who's found coaching someone else on a TI is dismissed. Anyone caught prepping for a TI is dismissed. A TI is the confessional of the spies' cathedral, every agent's ritual Pater Noster.

The results of Buckley's TI were put in his file in the CIA's security office. In the same file, which the CIA calls an agent's 201, the security officer who'd evaluated Buckley's performance placed a signed copy of Buckley's oath of secrecy. It was the first of many that he'd sign during his career. He promised to tell the truth and to keep the nation's secrets, to obey its laws and guard the national security.

Finally, Buckley was given his orders: he would remain in the army and tell no one that he was actually employed by the CIA. The Agency would ensure that he received the training he needed. He'd get his first orders at the end of his field training. Until then, he was told, he'd take courses in international relations, intelligence analysis, research and evaluation, international communism, and special operations.

THE CIA IS MORE DOGGED IN TEACHING people how to spy than most people realize. CIA indoctrination is emotionally exhausting and physically exacting. Training the intellect is given less attention than training the body for survival; spying is as much technique as gray matter. Agents are expected to be in shape and to know how to escape, hide, fight, kill, and calm their fears. They're trained to intercept radio communications, plant bugs, surreptitiously listen in on conversations, identify friends, and discredit foes. An agent is more than casually dishonest; the life of a patriot can lead to outright paranoia. Trust is a comfort of those who never fight, who've never endured the physical brutality of military training, which is still the core of an agent's first months as a CIA employee.

Buckley spent the last six months of 1955 at Langley taking the usual recruits' training. At the end of his stint he was dispatched to Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where he received psychological operations training at the army's newly established special warfare school. The training was the brainchild of Major General Robert McClure, who'd been General Eisenhower's "psyops" officer in Europe during World War II. McClure was using Fort Bragg to train Eastern European immigrants in the fine art of subversion before they were sent back into the Soviet Union's new satellite states. When Buckley wasn't being trained, he was training others, attempting to mold the Germans, Czechs, Magyars, and Poles into a small but effective anti-Soviet strike force that could operate with impunity behind the Iron Curtain.

Not every CIA official believed that the operation would work, for the Eastern European recruits were well meaning but inexperienced. They claimed that they controlled parties of untold numbers whose far-flung networks would rise up and throw off the Bolshevik jackal, but it was an illusion; they were defeated men who controlled parties composed of themselves. They were demi-Napoleons who ranted endlessly against the injustice of it all. In the end, skeptics warned, most of them would be identified and eliminated.

Eventually, the skeptics were proved to be right: few of those who returned to their homelands became valuable sources of information. Some simply vanished. A few were behind pathetic operations that ended in embarrassing show trials put on by the East's new rulers. The trials seemed to say it all, as if the KGB were sending a pathetic plea to the CIA: Can't you do any better than this?

At the end of 1955 Buckley was recalled to Washington and detailed to the army's technical training facility at Fort Meade, Maryland, where

Mid 1979 *Buckley is part of an American team that's assigned to train Anwar Sadat's bodyguards. Cairo, Buckley discovers, is on the edge of revolt.*

November 4, 1979 *U.S. embassy employees in Tehran are taken hostage by Iranian revolutionary students.*

November 21, 1979 *The U.S. consulate in Islamabad, Pakistan is sacked by fundamentalist students. Buckley narrowly escapes and spends the balance of the year in Mexico City.*

January 1980 *Buckley is an adviser to Operation Eagle Claw, President Carter's ill-fated plan to rescue the American hostages in Iran. The mission's failure further embitters Buckley against the U.S. national security bureaucracy.*

February 1981 *Buckley is part of a unit that trains the army's latest counterterrorism group, the Intelligence Support Activity, in Fayetteville.*

March 1981 *Buckley meets William Casey, the director of the CIA, and becomes one of his important advisers and friends.*

June 1981 *Buckley returns to Cairo to continue his training of Sadat's bodyguards. His observations rein-*

PHOTOGRAPH (CENTER) HENRI BUREAU/SYGMA

nications Group, a reserve unit that the CIA used to train recruits in intercept techniques. After classes on Friday and Saturday the boys of the 902nd headed into the countryside around Baltimore and tapped into phone lines, identifying the callers and the called. It was a straight and simple operation. Spying 101. The Agency valued the training because it provided experience in its more technical operations and because it fostered camaraderie among the troops.

In early 1956 Buckley became an analyst at Langley. At the time the Agency was engaged in a murderous battle with the KGB in Berlin, Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest, a battle that was leading to the deaths of the Agency's best agents. The killings were turning the CIA into a battleground of recriminations. To get to the bottom of the trouble, Buckley and others analyzed thousands of pages of intercepts that had come from "the Berlin tunnel," a massive underground communications complex that had tapped into the Soviets' military communications line between East Berlin and the Kremlin. The lines that connected the seat of the Soviet empire to its vassal states ran raw with some of the most interesting intelligence anyone had ever seen. The tap was considered to be the greatest intelligence coup in history. The intercepts were processed, translated, analyzed, reassessed, and then, inevitably, used to identify Soviet agents in the West. It was Ultra and Enigma rolled into one—a greater victory than any military maneuver could promise.

Despite the avalanche of information, however, the CIA's assets in Eastern Europe continued to turn up dead. It was absolutely frightening. Eventually the mounting number of deaths led CIA officials to conclude that there was an insider somewhere, a mole who was passing the secrets.

The CIA took extraordinary steps to plug its leak. The final step was to shut down the tunnel operation. It seemed, at least at the time, to be the only possible solution. The murders had begun when the tunnel was opened; they'd likely stop when it was closed. Only much later did the Agency learn the source of the leak. In the early 1960s British government officials admitted that a number of their top agents had been passing secrets to the KGB—a shocking security breach that shook the foundations of the British government. England's deputy station chief in Berlin, these officials said, had kept the Soviets apprised of information that had been received from the tunnel.

Analyzing raw data was exciting work for Buckley—a chance to prove that he'd be a valuable Agency employee—but it hardly made for the kind of career he'd envisioned. His combat experience in Korea, he believed, indicated that he'd be more valuable to the CIA in the field as a military trainer for operations that used military assets. By the beginning of 1957 he'd made it clear that he was tired of being "an intelligence chopper." He said he wanted to get back to soldiering.

In 1959 he got his wish. He won an assignment as a military trainer to the CIA's Cuba Brigade in Florida. Composed of exiled Cuban civilians and former officials of Batista's government, the Cuba Brigade was the brainchild of Allen Dulles, President Eisenhower's director of central intelligence. The idea was to employ it in an effort to replace Castro's government with a pro-American regime, as had been done in Guatemala in 1954. Molding the disparate political elements of the Cuban community into a military strike force was challenging work, but Buckley was particularly adept at it.

"He loved this kind of work," one of Buckley's friends from the period says. "He hated the bureaucracy, just hated it, so getting this hands-on stuff, getting away from Langley, just brought him out."

If Buckley hated the bureaucracy before his unit hit the beaches of Cuba, he despised it afterward. Within 48 hours of the invasion on April 16, 1961, it was clear that the Bay of Pigs operation had failed. Like most of his fellow Agency officers, Buckley was quick to blame the inner circles of the Kennedy administration, which had pulled the brigade's air cover just as the operation began.

"He just couldn't believe it," a friend says. "All this work and then they just threw it away. He was just crushed, really. Very angry."

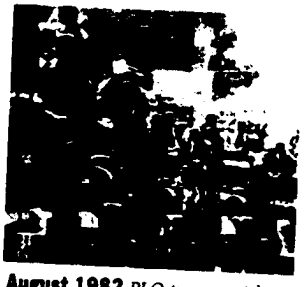
IN THE WAKE OF THE BAY OF PIGS FIASCO, Buckley continued his search for the best way to use his considerable talents. He told the Agency that he wanted to maintain his operational freedom, that he'd prefer not to be detailed to Langley. In fact, the Agency wasn't about to bring him back into the bureaucracy, especially in light of the Kennedy administration's new emphasis on special operations. After Kennedy established the Green Berets, the CIA sent Buckley to Fort Bragg to become a Special Forces expert, one of the few CIA men who had training in the area. Buckley's expertise brought him a promotion and respect among Agency officials, who were being pressed by Kennedy to turn out a new generation of counterinsurgency experts. It was to be the newest and most effective form of warfare, a way of doing battle that would turn back the tide of Third World rebels who answered to Moscow.

The experience was another challenge for Buckley, a way he could put his military training to use. By 1964, however, Buckley realized that the real action wasn't in training the Green Berets after all. The real challenge was in leading them in battle, in fighting in Vietnam.

force his feelings that Sadat is danger.

October 1981 *Sadat is assassinated while he watches a military parade in Cairo.*

Early 1982 *At Casey's request, Buckley agrees to become the CIA liaison in Lebanon. The assignment, he is told, will be a short one since it is clear that he's been identified as a CIA agent. He hopes that the assignment will be his last one in the Middle East.*



August 1982 *PLO troops withdraw from Beirut; Buckley serves as the CIA's eyes on the operation. He returns to Langley to conduct a high-level assessment of the U.S. government's counterterrorism policy.*

April 18, 1983 *The U.S. embassy in Beirut is bombed. The head of the CIA's Near East division, Robert Ames, and other top officers are killed.*

June or July 1983 *Buckley is reassigned to Beirut by Casey in direct contravention of CIA policy.*

PHOTOGRAPHS (TOP) EL KOUSSY/SYGMA, (CENTER) G. RANCINAN SYGMA, (BOTTOM) BILL PIERCE SYGMA

Vietnam was a carnival of death, a brutal freak show. In the jungles of Southeast Asia, American chrome and flash wrestled with Vietnamese fangs and claws in a horror house of death. Buckley arrived in Saigon just in time to see the beginning of the madness; he was stunned to stark disbelief when he witnessed the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk. He knew then that Vietnam would be a different kind of war, a war more terrifying than any America had ever fought. Within weeks after he took his job as the commander of a Nha Trang-based shooter team (a counterinsurgency squad that hunted Vietcong units), he went deep into the war, transforming himself into the epitome of a soldier, a man alone against the darkness. His assignment would last, on and off, for a decade.

Buckley's transformation was an immunization against the stupidity of the American strategy; he drew a line between the institutionalized insanity and indiscriminate murder of the free-fire zones and his own belief that the war could only be won by the individual soldier. His closest friends noticed it first. Buckley became an ascetic fighter, a man pleased by the essentials: a well-made bunk, a broken-in pair of boots, two pairs of rumpled greens, and a combat cap. His pistol and rifle were shiny steel, his sole novena to the conflict. Eventually, he believed, America's chrome machine would rust and break down, leaving rifle-toting soldiers to decide the contest in unbroken combat in jungles and rice paddies.

Buckley's assignment was to work with South Vietnamese intelligence operatives to identify and neutralize the Vietcong's political network in South Vietnam's Central Highlands. It was one of the first assignments of its kind, a highly sensitive military and intelligence operation that the Agency wanted to keep under wraps. Buckley ran operations against his intelligence counterparts who worked with the Vietcong and North Vietnamese army. Posing as a civilian political analyst, he also doubled as a uniformed American adviser who trained South Vietnam's native tribesmen.

Within a month of his arrival in South Vietnam, Buckley had transformed his unit of hill tribesmen into a legendary jungle fighting force. He took to his group of men immediately; he found them honest, compassionate, and, above all, uncommonly brave. They never hesitated to carry out an assignment, even when they understood its danger. He learned as much from them as they learned from him, and he gloried in their successes. Night after night, through months of combat anguish, he practiced his trade, scoring a kill here, then there, always making certain that the fights were short, brutal, and without quarter.

BUCKLEY'S SUCCESS WAS SOON THE TALK of 60 Pasteur Street, the CIA's dingy six-story walk-up in the Saigon suburb of Cholon. In these early days of the war, few Americans could boast of the kinds of victories that Buckley won. Fewer still survived the intricate web of corruption that infected the American war effort. Buckley remained uncompromised and uncorrupted, and he showed the same bravery he'd shown in Korea.

"I saw him go down tunnels without hesitation," a friend from Buckley's Indochina days says. "He wanted to show how it could be done. One day, soon after he arrived, his group flushed a VC official from a village, but he just disappeared. We found the tunnel and in Buckley went—absolutely fearless, you know. He came out an hour later and looked like hell. But he got the guy."

Buckley's first two-year stint in Vietnam included a short stay in Savannakhet, Laos, a putrid Mekong River town known for its intrigue, opium, corruption, and brothels. It was Buckley's first seriously dangerous assignment in Indochina; he worked with Laotian officials to uncover the network of North Vietnamese and Soviet agents who wanted to undermine Laos's neutrality.

"He stood on street corners," a colleague remembers. "He would watch the streets for hours and

October 23, 1983 *The U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut are bombed; 241 marines die. Buckley views the disaster from his apartment in West Beirut.*

February 1984 *Candace Hammond, who'd been romantically involved with Buckley for several years, receives her last phone call from Buckley. "He said he hoped he'd be coming home soon," she remembers. "I knew he thought he was in danger. He was very upset. He kept talking about going with me to antique shops, about how he enjoyed that."*

Hammond continues: "He told me before he went to Beirut that he was expendable, that he was being sent there by his boss because he didn't matter much. I thought he was a little bitter."

March 16, 1984 *Buckley is kidnapped by the Islamic Jihad in Beirut. Casey orders an immediate rescue attempt.*

May 1984 *The FBI and the army's Intelligence Support Activity launch intelligence operations in Lebanon in the hope of locating Buckley and securing his return.*

Late 1984 *Buckley is held in the Bekaa valley. Some CIA operatives claim that he is also interrogated in Damascus and possibly transferred to Tehran.*

June 1985 *Buckley dies in Tehran*

PHOTOGRAPH (TOP) STUART FRANKLIN/SYGMA

[illegible] Communists. He knew exactly what he was up against."

Buckley soon became one of the CIA's most successful Indochina assets, known as much for his intelligence insights as for his personal bravery.

"He could really run an agent," says one of his former CIA cohorts. "It's half knowing what to look for, where to send someone. Vietnam was a shit hole, but he loved it. Loved everything about it."

Buckley loved Vietnam so much that he signed on for another two-year stint and then yet another: he put six years of his life into saving Vietnam from the Communists. According to Agency officials, his career was made by his work during the war, where he began to carve out a personal legend as an indestructible agent. He won another Silver Star, apparently as a result of an operation he launched to blow up an ammunition cache on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos in 1969. Like his other irregulars, Buckley was dropped into western Laos by helicopter and left to make his way into NVA territory. Veterans of these operations are quick to spell out the dangers involved: the NVA were smart and secretive and often trailed Americans for miles in the jungles, waiting for them to let down their guard. Then they left their calling cards, marking the American dead in Laos with a brutality unequaled in any other war.

"There wasn't one time in any of these [operations] when we weren't on the run when we came out," says a former Special Forces soldier. "You had to stay awake. If you dozed off, they had you. They were always so damn good; they knew we were there every time. It was just a matter of outrunning them—of getting in, doing it, and getting out."

In mid 1969 Buckley moved his team of Laotian irregulars into the NVA's heartland and detonated a North Vietnamese army depot. Colleagues say that the odds were against Buckley, but he managed to come out without a scratch.

"He was just cold about it," says a CIA regular. "He must have been afraid, but I could never tell, really. He communicated it to others. He was just so damn cool that everyone thought, Well, if this asshole can do it, I should be able to."

Buckley ended up running dozens of operations. Almost all of them ended with him and his team emerging from the jungle to grab ropes dangling from the helicopters

[illegible] to safety. On one such operation, apparently in South Vietnam, Buckley met Beck, a Navy Seal who was to remain a lifelong friend.

"He had this gruff exterior," Beck says, "and then I got to know him. He was a warm human being, very warm. He loved the Vietnamese people; he had real sympathy for them."

After the war Beck and Buckley operated an antique store in Manassas, Virginia. "He had an incredibly dry sense of humor, and he was continually cracking jokes," Beck recalls. "He was upset if people didn't bargain. He'd say, 'Why didn't you bargain with me? Come on, get the price down.' The customers would love him."

Beck, who calls Buckley "one of the most generous human beings I've ever met," says that in Laos Buckley befriended a number of native families and became especially close to one that had suffered greatly from the nation's civil war. In the late 1960s he convinced a West German family to help a young Laotian child that he knew; the West Germans adopted the girl. When she wanted to go to college, Buckley paid for it. He met the girl on one of his many trips to Europe in the early 1980s, but he never told her that he'd helped her.

It wasn't the first time that Buckley had shown his compassionate side to the world. According to a number of colleagues from his Vietnam days, he generously supported an orphanage that had been started in Da Nang; there are even reports that he monitored the orphanage's progress after the war.

But Buckley's blood could also run cold. "I can see him now, you know, the way he was back then," Beck says. "We had this big operation, and everyone was very tentative. I could tell he was frustrated with the way it was going, how long it was taking. So he just said, 'Oh, the hell with it.' We'd done all this planning, and he just went out and did it. He one-upped us all. He just blew the hell out of those people."

Buckley also took part in far more dangerous operations inside South Vietnam after 1969, when he was detailed to the legendary Military Assistance Command Surveillance and Observation Group (known by its acronym, MACSOG). As a U.S. operative with 15 years of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism training, he became one of MACSOG's most sought-after operatives. Based in Nha Trang, he conducted "order of battle" reports on NVA and VC units, undermined the area's VC political offices, and identified VC officials for assassination as part of the Phoenix program.

By the end of 1969 Buckley had himself been targeted by the VC and NVA for assassination. "Look, Buckley did what most CIA agents did then," a former MACSOG officer says. "This was a war. He ran teams, and did a damned good job doing it."

Some MACSOG officers remember Buckley differently, however: as an agent who took too many chances and who exposed himself unnecessarily. A few claim that by 1970, at the end of his sixth year in Indochina, he'd become a clear security risk to ongoing CIA operations.

"Buckley just didn't know when to stop," says intelligence analyst Corson. "He was a true believer, an intelligence swashbuckler. He couldn't leave well enough alone. He wanted it all. The CIA worries about guys like that; it starts thinking that maybe they want to die."

Other charges were also made. It was whispered that Buckley played it "too loose" during his time in Vietnam. He'd always been a womanizer, but never more so than during his Vietnam assignment. His many liaisons were the talk of the CIA station—as much a sign of envy as a cautionary note that his habits could lead to trouble. If the Agency is anything, it is puritanical. No one really believed that Buckley was a security risk because of his romantic liaisons, but a rake is more likely to be compromised than a man who minds his own business.

"He was just careless," says an agent, "and it could have led to trouble. It didn't, but it certainly could have."

BY 1973 BUCKLEY WAS IN DANGER IN Vietnam, but not simply as a result of his covert activities. Former special operations officials, all of whom served with Buckley, say that he served his last years in Indochina in something less than an official capacity. For two years, these former "Green beanies" say, Buckley ran the PRU campaign in South Vietnam. It was a brutally taxing job that took him into the ugliest part of the war.

The PRUs, or Provincial Reconnaissance Units, were the CIA's answer to North Vietnam's campaign of terror. In essence, the PRUs were assassination squads—tightly run, inhumanly disciplined, viciously exacting in their retribution. They killed thousands of Vietnamese—more than 50,000, according to some reports. Buckley reportedly did a magnificent job, serving with great competence and even greater loyalty under the CIA's station chief, Ted Shackley.

For two years Buckley dispatched teams and issued orders from the CIA's small office in Cholon. The teams gathered intelligence, probed Vietcong strongholds, and identified VC commanders in provinces under South Vietnamese control. It was the assignment that Buckley had wanted since his days in Korea. While the U.S. Army struggled to gain control of the country, he fought the real war from behind his desk. If the war was to be won, he believed, it would be won in the villages. The Americans might pummel and grind enemy units to dust, might annihilate enemy units on the battlegrounds, but ultimately the war would be won (or lost) by men like him—men who eliminated the enemy's leadership.

The war took its toll. By 1973 Buckley was a shadow of the man he'd been when he'd come to Saigon a decade before. His various eccentricities and his almost reverential worship of the lone warrior had destroyed his relations with his colleagues. He was a silent and stern disciplinarian, an exacting and irritating workaholic. The war had swallowed him just as it had swallowed others. It consumed his every moment with an obsessive need to tackle the task at hand.

Buckley's transformation made him a hated enemy to some of his associates. A colleague describes him in sarcastic, biting terms: as the kind of man who'd count every penny of the Company's change, piling up the silver and copper in neat little stacks of quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies. Like Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or the colonel in *Apocalypse Now*, Buckley believed that he personified the war, that he could do things that others couldn't or wouldn't do. And he made certain that they knew it. Buckley bore the cross for the Agency in Vietnam, becoming an impatient taskmaster—a characteristic that might have been overlooked if only he hadn't become so insufferable.

IN 1973, AT THE END OF THE VIETNAM debacle, Buckley was ordered back to Langley again. According to those who knew him during this period of his career, the recall couldn't have come at a better time. According to these associates, Buckley's name had appeared on a list of CIA agents that was circulated in East Germany in 1970. In the Agency's parlance, he'd been "burned"; he'd been identified as an agent in Saigon, in Nha Trang, in Savannakhet, in East Berlin, and, CIA officials feared, in Hanoi.

Buckley's trail goes cold after Vietnam—an indication of the extraordinary steps he took to stay alive. After his high-profile years in the front lines of MACSOG's twilight foot soldiers, he stayed close to Langley, marshaling his few friendships and waiting for new jobs and bigger challenges. After a year-long debriefing, the CIA dispatched him to West Germany, where he served as a high-level Agency official in Bonn. It should have been a quiet time for the Company, which was in the process of withdrawing many of its assets from Indochina, but it wasn't. By the mid 1970s it was clear to almost everyone at the CIA that the battle lines in the war of the international intelligence services were once again about to shift.

Chapter Three: The Middle East

IN 1978 BUCKLEY WAS SENT TO SYRIA, where he served as a political officer in the U.S. embassy. The assignment was the first of many for him in the Middle East, a new front line in the CIA's widening intelligence war. Over the next six years he served in six assignments in six parts of the world.

When Buckley arrived in Damascus, the city was awash with rumors about Syria's leader, Hafez al-Assad: he was said to be under fire from his own party, was reported to be seriously ill, and, at one point, was even rumored to be on his way to foreign exile. Buckley had trouble confirming the rumors; his informants were extremely frightened. Syria's internal security operatives provided formidable opposition to him, so much so that he often couldn't tell whether his informants were providing as much information to them as they were to him. As he'd done in Vietnam, he decided to take some risks to get good information.

"It was almost inevitable that he'd be identified. It was only a matter of time," says a CIA contract employee. "He'd been identified in East Germany, and it was fairly easy for the Syrians to pick him out of the embassy crowd in Damascus."

It was hardly a surprise, then, that Buckley was soon burned again, this time by the Syrian government. His almost too-easy identification with the Agency prompted a quick but temporary recall to Washington. He was happy to be out of Syria, but angered that he'd been unable to provide the information that the CIA needed. He returned to Langley convinced that his Syrian experience meant that he'd spend the rest of his career in Washington. It was just too dangerous to send him overseas.

Much to his surprise, however, in mid 1979 Buckley was dispatched to Cairo, where he assisted in the training of Anwar Sadat's bodyguards. In the wake of the Camp David Accords, the United States had promised some $4 billion in military and internal security assistance to Egypt, most of it to be provided in the way of training by U.S. Pentagon subcontractors. The deal was a bargain: in exchange for the money the United States gained a secure ally in the Middle East, and Israel was no longer threatened by a two-front war.

At least part of the reason for Buckley's acquiescence to the CIA's decision to send him to Cairo had to do with his sense of personal loyalty. Loyalty was a prized commodity at the Agency, perhaps the only thing that could've made Buckley work in a part of the world where he'd been identified as a CIA asset.

Buckley's time in Cairo was short-lived. A sudden, peremptory order from Langley cut off his assignment in Egypt only months after he'd arrived. The CIA told him that he was needed in Pakistan, where the U.S. consulate had security difficulties. Such sudden changes in assignments were happening to Agency employees throughout the Middle East; the CIA was running into trouble across the Moslem rim, and it needed experienced operatives to shore up its embattled stations.

In September 1979 Buckley reported to the CIA's station in Islamabad, a city that was being buffeted by the fallout from Iran's Islamic revolution. The assignment turned out to be a nightmare.

"Pakistan was a goddamned mess," a former CIA contract employee says. "The whole damned Arab world was coming down around our ears. The shah was out, the Saudi royal family was fearing for its life, Afghanistan was a disaster, Iraq hated our guts, Lebanon was being torn to shreds. We thought it was all over, that they were going to kick us out on our asses."

They almost did. On November 4, 1979 America's embassy personnel in Iran were taken hostage and paraded blindfolded through the streets of Tehran. The ayatollah called the United States "the great Satan," and U.S. agents, who'd been identified in the files kept by the shah's secret police, were running for their lives.

A little more than two weeks later, on November 20, 1979, a group of Islamic fundamentalists took over Islam's holiest shrine in Mecca. "At first, it looked like a full-fledged revolution in Saudi Arabia," a

CIA analyst reports. "They were taking us apart—first the shah, and now the royal family."

American trainers, including some of Buckley's best friends, led the Saudi National Guard in an operation against the well-armed fundamentalists. For 24 hours Saudi soldiers exchanged gunfire with them. The crisis was made worse by the royal family's insistence that Americans not accompany Saudi troops inside the shrine. Though American Special Forces advisers told the Saudis that their decision would result in a bloodbath, the royal family's wishes were followed. The operation resulted in a paroxysm of brutal hand-to-hand combat, but within 72 hours the fundamentalists had been subdued. The Saudi National Guard, trained by paramilitary experts that had been hired under a Pentagon contract with Vinnell Corporation, one of Washington's beltway bandits, had done its job with vicious precision.

From his desk at the U.S. consulate in Islamabad, Buckley watched the events in Saudi Arabia with growing concern. Pakistan's fundamentalists, who were willing believers of Iranian reports that the attack on Mecca was a CIA operation, were restive. The day after the Mecca takeover, Buckley had a taste of just how dangerous the situation in the Near East had become. As a crowd of chanting Pakistanis jeered from the street, U.S. employees were ushered into the embassy's vault. The crowd began to storm the outer gates and climb the high wire fence that surrounded the compound. The marines couldn't hold them off. In a rush of zeal the American office was taken and its files set ablaze. The embassy's employees made their escape through a trap door and onto the roof. Like other agents of the CIA's station in Islamabad, Buckley evaded the Pakistani army, which had been sent to lift the siege, and made his way to the British consulate across the city. In 24 hours he was spirited out of the country.

ACCORDING TO LATER REPORTS, BUCKLEY was "protected" by the Agency, which assigned him to a low-profile position in Mexico City as an executive of Pemex Corporation, the Mexican government-owned petroleum company. Two independent sources confirm Buckley's tenure with the company, and yet Buckley's closest friends say that he never spent any time with Pemex—or at least he never talked about it. Regardless of whether Buckley was given a job in Mexico or not, he was told that he'd have to stay out of the Middle East.

No later than early 1980 Buckley returned to Langley to help the Carter administration plan its military mission to rescue the American hostages in Tehran. His assignment was to monitor the rescue operation, to represent the CIA's interests at the Pentagon, and to advise the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the operation's chance of success.

Buckley immediately felt at ease with the JCS officers, a group of Special Forces veterans and Vietnam hands who understood his sense of urgency. Operation Eagle Claw was to be the JCS's claim to history, indisputable evidence that the United States would strike back when its citizens were in danger. But Buckley was skeptical; while he participated in most of the meetings on the rescue operation, he criticized the plan as being vulnerable to technical failure and full of operational danger. Buckley turned out to be right—Eagle Claw failed for just the reasons he mentioned—but that was no consolation. In its aftermath, with pictures of burning helicopters plastered on the nation's television screens, Buckley decided to accept the CIA's offer to become part of a new team of special operations experts that was being put together by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

According to the JCS's plan, the services' separate special operations groups were to be molded into one unit that would be based in Fayetteville. In early 1981 Buckley was assigned to conduct this new unit's training. In addition, he served as the CIA's liaison to a secret army intelligence group that was later identified as the Intelligence Support Activity, a hybrid covert intelligence unit that was established to be an extension of the army's special operations capability.

Buckley had been identified in Vietnam, in East Germany, in Syria, and almost certainly in Pakistan. The Agency had no plans to make him even more vulnerable by sending him back to the volatile Middle East, at least for the time being. But he remained a valued asset, even more so in the Reagan administration. He divided his time between Fayetteville and Washington, between training the military's new antiterrorist team and reorganizing the CIA's counterterrorism office.

During one of his trips to Fayetteville Buckley became romantically involved with Candace Hammond, a landscape architect who now lives in Farmer, North Carolina. "I thought he was very handsome and very much a gentleman," says Hammond. "I can't remember a time when he didn't open a door for me, when he wasn't mannered. That's the way he was.

"Why, I can see him now, sitting in the rocking chair that he loved so well," adds Hammond, who says that she was completely unaware of Buckley's secret identity. "He would sit there for hours. He was so political, you know. I could never talk when the news was on; he'd go crazy. He'd laugh about it, about the news, because he was so conservative. And he really was; he said that he was just to the right of Attila the Hun. He said it all the time, and he'd laugh."

IN EARLY 1981 BUCKLEY WAS CALLED back to Langley by none other than Casey, who'd taken to reading the Agency's personnel files. When Casey, who'd served in the intelligence services during World War II, ran across Buckley's name, he asked to be introduced to him. The two CIA hands got on well. As their friendship deepened, Casey often turned to Buckley for advice on how the Agency should respond to threats against its intelligence operations.

Buckley's friendship with Casey began to pay dividends almost immediately. Within weeks of their meeting, Buckley became Casey's special adviser, accompanying him on a series of overseas inspections. In April 1981 Casey and Buckley traveled to the Middle East, where they met with the head of the CIA's operations in Saudi Arabia. It was a heady tour; after years of loyal but obscure service, Buckley was at the right hand of the CIA's top officer.

Still, this wasn't exactly the kind of power that Buckley wanted. The Buckley-Casey tour of Saudi Arabia brought back memories, and Buckley told Casey that he'd like to be back in operations. In particular, Buckley's closest friends report, Buckley told Casey that he thought he had some unfinished business in Cairo, where the United States was still providing training to Sadat's personal security force.

"He was always a field guy," a CIA source says. "The officialdom of the Agency got him down. He was always claustrophobic."

Casey grudgingly acceded to Buckley's request, and Buckley returned to Cairo in June 1981.

BUCKLEY'S STAY IN EGYPT WAS A RESPITE from his usual CIA duties. In a different time, his months in Cairo might well have been considered the epitome of a man's life. These were new days for the CIA in Egypt. U.S. citizens were granted unprecedented access to the upper reaches of a Moslem country

Sadat loved Americans; he affected Western attitudes and styles, and he believed that Egypt could gain entrance to the modern era only by tying its future to that of the United States. His nation needed to be modernized, and for that it needed peace. Buckley and his team of American trainers enjoyed the fruit of this new political philosophy.

"It was an open city," says a former special operations trainer. "It wasn't like anywhere else back then in the whole Moslem world. Egypt was isolated, you know, the only friend on the other side of things that Israel had. Money was pouring into the country. Americans were treated like kings."

Once again, however, Buckley sounded an alarm. Within weeks of his arrival he reported that Sadat was in greater danger than he or anyone in the United States had believed. Using his experiences in Pakistan as a model, he told his colleagues that Sadat actually had little control over the course of events in his country. Egypt, Buckley insisted, was about to explode, the fuse sparked by the fires of Iran's 1979 revolution. To Buckley, it seemed as if an explosion was inevitable: the nightmare that had awakened him in Damascus and that had stalked him in Islamabad had reared its ugly head in Cairo. And on a sultry October afternoon in 1981, a group of Islamic revolutionaries jumped from their troop carriers during an official military parade and gunned down the man whom Buckley was sent to protect.

"It was just another fuck-up," says a CIA Middle East analyst.

Buckley's report on the assassination was highly critical of the United States' inability to protect an ally. Buckley made enemies with his paper, for he argued that providing protection for America's friends would never be enough; the problems in the Middle East and in the emerging nations of the Third World, he argued, had to be attacked on all fronts. When he returned to Langley 60 days after the incident, he reported directly to Casey and reviewed the events that had led to Sadat's assassination.

THIS TIME BUCKLEY'S STAY AT LANGLEY was even shorter than his previous one. Just seven years short of retirement, his friendship with Casey sealed by their common mistrust of the Agency's entrenched bureaucracy and the horror of America's failure in Cairo, Casey asked Buckley if he would report on the CIA's activities in Lebanon. Casey couched his order as a question,

as a tentative, personal request. There were dangers involved, Casey admitted, but he needed someone he could trust to do the job, and Buckley was really the only one.

Hesitantly, Buckley yielded to the request, though he knew that Casey was acting well outside normal CIA procedures. The Company's internal rules say that an agent who's been identified in one part of the world has to take another assignment for at least five years before he returns. In addition, a senior team has to review the assignment and assess its danger.

In fact, Casey had little choice when he selected Buckley; the CIA's intelligence agents throughout the Near East had been identified when the U.S. embassies in Tripoli, Islamabad, and Tehran were taken over. Even if Casey had looked around for someone else to take the assignment, he wouldn't have found anyone. The CIA's best agents were running for their lives, and precious few had gotten out alive.

Casey was desperate; he was sure he could rely on Buckley, that his request would have an impact. Buckley had always agreed to such "requests" in the past; he knew an order when he heard one.

AT THE END OF AUGUST 1982 BUCKLEY stood in a crowd of marines at Beirut's waterfront watching the PLO's militias depart from the city. The PLO fighters, who'd met the Israelis in combat, waved their weapons in the air and shot off the last of their ammunition in a celebration of their victory. What was left of Beirut had been turned to rubble.

In a last-ditch effort to stave off a house-to-house battle, President Reagan had dispatched U.S. forces to guarantee the safety of the Palestinian civilians who remained in the city; Buckley was on hand as an observer and a trainer for the small Lebanese armed forces. For weeks he'd planned the PLO's withdrawal, negotiating a series of agreements with Beirut's welter of militias. Now, with his plan nearly completed, he wondered whether the CIA would play it safe and order him back to Langley. For several weeks he'd felt that his cover had been blown. With his Western dress, his rugged American looks, and his plain suits, he "had CIA written all over him," according to one American.

When the marines left Beirut in September 1982, Buckley went with them. He returned to Washington, where Casey told him that he'd next be responsible for coordinating the Reagan administration's anti-terrorism policy. The job was a reward for his years in the field; for the first time in his career, he'd be responsible for a CIA policy. Casey told Buckley that he'd be the policy's chief architect and would report to the director of central intelligence through the head of what was then called the Domestic Terrorism Group.

For six months Buckley and government officials hammered out a policy. The Agency would be responsible solely for foreign intelligence, he insisted, leaving domestic security in the hands of the FBI.

"It was a delicate job," a former CIA analyst says. "Buckley not only had to come up with a policy that everyone could agree to, he had to make sure it would work. He offended some people, but I think he was right. When the Federal Emergency Management Administration and some of those others thought they should have a piece of the counterterrorism pie, he told them, 'No way. You're going to have nothing to do with it.' You know, he told them to go to hell."

After months of work, Buckley presented his counterterrorism plan to Casey. It included a recommendation that the Domestic Terrorism Group change its name to the International Antiterrorism Group. The name change was significant: Buckley was signaling his concern that the CIA could be accused of domestic spying, which had caused trouble in the 1970s. Buckley's plan called for a coordinated effort to combat security breaches under the leadership of the National Security Council's director, who'd be in charge of monitoring the agencies that were responsible for domestic law enforcement. According to a government security official, Buckley's recommendations were "straight down the middle. There was nothing really creative about what he said. He just made it clear that all of these people who wanted to have something to do with it were better off watching their own shops. He called them 'those crazies.'"

Despite Buckley's concern that the CIA assiduously follow his plan's mandates, many of his recommendations were later weakened. Acording to a number of Pentagon officials, the Domestic Terrorism Group later became part of a secret Pentagon intelligence unit that was then coming under scrutiny, the Intelligence Support Activity. Buckley had been part of the Intelligence Support Activity during the planning for the hostage rescue operation in 1979. It ran intelligence operations in Libya and participated in the rescue of General James Dozier, who'd been kidnapped by Italy's Red Brigade. Buckley watched the slow disintegration of his plan with frustration; it was more proof that the best intentions can be undone by a hellish bureaucracy.

Despite these frustrations, Buckley finished his special assignment with a sense of relief; he had only a few years left until retirement. But his relief was short-lived. In March 1983 an Islamic terrorist detonated an explosive outside the U.S. embassy in Beirut. It was perhaps the most serious breach of security in the CIA's history. Sixteen Americans were killed, including the Agency's Near East Division chief, Robert Ames. Ames, who'd been sent to Lebanon for a meeting with Agency operatives, had been in the country for only 24 hours. The photographs of the collapsed embassy sent shudders through the operations directorate at Langley.

"We were ripped apart over there," says a retired Agency official who spent his career at Langley. "They took us out in Iran, got all those files. We had embassies on fire everywhere. It makes sense that they would get our files. But Ames was a loss. Hell, no one wanted to be there. It was a major disaster."

In June, Casey told Buckley that he wanted him back in Lebanon, this time as the CIA's station chief in Beirut. Beck, who served with Buckley on this assignment, remembers Buckley's reaction. "He knew his duty," Beck says. "Things were rough, but he knew the dangers. He never shied away from anything.

The situation in Lebanon had become far worse than it was during Buckley's first assignment. Shackley believes that Buckley knew he was in an extremely vulnerable position. "Anyone in that part of the world has to know he's a target," Shackley says. "I'm sure Bill did. You know, it's like playing Russian roulette."

BUCKLEY CULTIVATED INFORMANTS IN an attempt to get information about Beirut's disparate political factions. His job once again meant that he'd eventually be burned by some of our nation's fiercest enemies.

The years hadn't eroded Buckley's fearlessness. In the midst of a firefight, Beck says, Buckley stepped into the street and demanded that the combatants lay down their weapons.

"I just couldn't believe it," Beck says. "Everyone stopped shooting and just looked at him. He stood there for a while, then went into a nearby café, where he was meeting a militia leader. He looked at this guy and said, 'Now that's more like it.'"

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One night Buckley and Beck were caught in an artillery barrage. After years of experience in the field, Buckley was unfazed. "We were in the middle of Beirut, and suddenly everything started going off," Beck remembers. "We were on our haunches up against some buildings, and Bill got hungry. So right in the middle of this artillery barrage he went next door, to a café called the George Washington, believe it or not, and got some food. He had no idea what it was. He came back and looked at me, shrugged his shoulders, and said, 'I just love to eat wet dog.'"

Buckley's best efforts to come up with information weren't enough; America's position in Lebanon was deteriorating rapidly. In a frenzy of activity, Buckley redoubled his efforts to infiltrate the Iranian-backed Islamic gangs that had sprung up in the city, but he was frustrated in his attempts. It was no longer merely a matter of getting good information; Buckley was responsible for making certain that the U.S. Marine peacekeeping force at Beirut's airport stayed out of danger.

In September 1983, according to a retired Pentagon intelligence official, Buckley was told that the Islamic Jihad, the most notorious revolutionary group in Beirut, was planning a major operation against the United States. But Buckley couldn't figure out the nature of the operation or who would be put at risk by it. Since the marines were protected, Buckley attempted to discover what other target the Jihad had in mind. "It could have been anyone," the Pentagon official says. "You never knew what was going to happen."

The report of a pending anti-American incident lay dormant for weeks. Buckley met with the commander of the marine unit to warn him of a possible attack. "Bill shared everything he knew with him," says Beck. "Every report he got he passed right on."

Noel Koch, a retired Pentagon official, also gave warnings to the marines. "We went out there and talked to some of these heavy breathers with the Lebanese armed forces and inspected the [marine] barracks," Koch says. "We warned them. We went to [the marine commander] and said, 'Hey, you've got some problems here.' You know what he said? He said, 'Don't tell us how to suck eggs. The marines know how to suck eggs better than anyone in the world.'"

On the morning of October 23, 1983 the marines in Beirut sucked eggs for the last time. In one of the corps' most shattering military disasters, 241 U.S. service-

men died in what the FBI would later call "the largest nonnuclear explosion in history." Buckley had found his terrorist operation. Looking out from his apartment, which had been rocked by the blast, he watched in disbelief as a large black cloud rose over Beirut.

Through the winter Buckley stoically attempted to put the pieces back together in Lebanon. More obsessive than ever, he took chances that he'd never taken before. He called on an untapped physical reserve, calming the Agency's fears and sending back terse reports of his progress in Lebanon. His task wasn't hopeless, but it was clear from his cables that the U.S. position in the Middle East was at its nadir. He struggled to repair the damage, and in fits and starts he won small victories where none had seemed possible.

And then suddenly, one morning, he was gone.

BUCKLEY HAD BEEN A CAPTAIN IN SOME of America's most secret wars. For three decades, on three continents, he'd served his country with unfailing loyalty and without question. But in that time he'd remained unaware of the most covert war of all: the war that was being fought inside the CIA itself. It was a war that would eventually decide his fate.

Within hours of Buckley's kidnapping, Casey had spit out his orders: find Buckley and find him fast. He'd pounded his desk when he'd said it, fairly leaping out from behind it. Yet it appears that nobody in the world's most renowned intelligence organization knew where to look.

The CIA's search for Buckley has become the stuff of controversy. Clair George, the Agency's deputy director of operations, told a reporter that he'd turned the operations directorate upside down looking for Buckley. Some of Buckley's colleagues scoff at the claim. Clair George is probably right, they say, he probably *did* turn the operations directorate upside down. But Buckley wasn't anywhere near it. He was in Beirut.

What steps the CIA took to find Buckley accomplished little. A special committee was set up to monitor the search. The National Security Agency was asked to provide high-resolution photographs of probable hostage hideouts in Beirut. Intelligence reports from the Middle East were scoured and scoured again. Finally, the Agency dispatched an FBI team to Beirut, then an army intelligence team. Both units went into Beirut's destroyed neighborhoods to poke here and there for a trace of Buckley.

But there isn't a hint that the Agency launched its own teams of operatives to turn Beirut upside down. Casey may have been desperate, but he was apparently unable to move the Agency to take extraordinary steps to find its own kidnapped station chief.

Those who served with Buckley and knew him best are adamant: the Agency did little or nothing to gain his release, and not simply because of bureaucratic inefficiency. Theirs is something more than mere barroom talk, and not much less than flat-out allegations of betrayal. Buckley was hated by a number of important covert action operators, they contend, and had made enough enemies to ensure that when he needed help they'd do not quite everything they could to find him. The tables had been turned; the man who'd stacked the coins on his desk in Saigon, who'd thumbed his nose at the bureaucrats, had had the nightmare loosed on him. The irony is horrifying: after years of being accused of working outside the law, the CIA played according to the rules.

"He wasn't liked. He wasn't liked at all," a CIA contract employee says. "Do I need to spell it out? There were people who hated him at the CIA, who were glad that he went to Beirut. Why the hell would they look for him?"

To understand the CIA's betrayal, say Buckley's friends, it's essential to understand the CIA. The Agency, they say, isn't a fraternity of like-minded, dedicated professionals bent on fighting the communist scourge. The CIA is a bureaucracy like any other, with its own petty hatreds, office politics, and banal complaints. The coffee goes unmade, desks need to be repaired, some employees get uppity. Buckley was one of them.

In the end, a number of events came together to seal Buckley's fate. All had to do with his personality, for he'd compiled a nearly unrivaled record of achievement in his career. He had, after all, accomplished what few CIA operatives dream of. He'd been burned in a handful of countries, and he'd gotten away with it. In Vietnam he'd been a top-notch combat operative, a brave, nearly reckless agent in an insane dance with death, and he'd gotten away with it. He'd been sent to the Middle East as an expert when he

wasn't one, and he'd gotten away with it. Finally, he'd been befriended by the most powerful CIA agent of all, William Casey, a fact that had made his colleagues (and bureaucratic competitors) in the covert action branch green with envy. They thought he was one of them, that he didn't belong in the jet stream. For some of them, it was almost too much to bear.

A friend of Buckley's gives a final judgment. "It's the perfect out," he says. "*We can't tell you what we did to get him back because it's a secret.* Like 'Mission Impossible': the Agency disavowed any knowledge of his activities. If they'd looked for him, then everyone would have known he was an agent. Stupid bastards."

It's hard to miss the bitterness in the words of those who believe Buckley was left out in the cold. For too many years, they say, he'd told others that their careers came before anything, that their work was the work of the nation, that their sacrifices weren't only necessary but expected. He'd told it to them in simple terms: do your work, do it well, obey the rules, and, above all, understand that the gratitude you receive will come from your knowledge that you've paid the ultimate price in silence. He'd said it in Vietnam when he'd run the PRU teams and demanded the impossible from his associates. Death is part of the job.

Now it was his turn.

EVENTUALLY BUCKLEY'S CLOSEST FRIENDS outside the Agency took steps to get him back. In a series of meetings held in Hamburg, West Germany in November 1984, Shackley, now retired from the CIA, assessed the possibility of striking a deal with the Iranian government for Buckley's return. Shackley met with Ghorbanifar in Hamburg at the suggestion of a former official of the shah's secret police, Manucher Hashemi. Ghorbanifar told Shackley that the Iranians would be willing to trade Russian military equipment that had been captured in their war with Iraq in exchange for Buckley. After three days of meetings, Shackley returned to the United States.

"That's when I wrote a memo to the State Department," Shackley says. "I knew Buckley professionally in Vietnam. I had great admiration for him. I sent the memo to the State Department, and that was the end of it."

The State Department rejected Ghorbanifar's offer of a straight arms-for-Buckley swap because it believed, with justification, that Ghorbanifar was "only interested in money and that his reputation as an untrustworthy source made his claims suspect." Still, the wheels had turned ever so slowly: Shackley had sent his memo to Vernon Walters, an ambassador-at-large; Walters had passed it on to Hugh Montgomery, the State Department's director of intelligence and research; Montgomery had given it to Robert Oakley, the State Department official who's in charge of counterterrorism; Oakley had taken it to Richard Murphy, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs. Oakley and Murphy had then given Shackley their answer: the deal was a "scam."

The Islamic Jihad was much less bureaucratic. After spiriting Buckley out of Beirut, it held him at the Abdullah barracks, its headquarters in the Bekaa valley, then shipped him to Syria for serious interrogation. Buckley was repeatedly tortured, and finally he broke under the pain. A June 1987 report says that he gave his captors "a virtually complete list of U.S. agents in the Middle East."

Buckley, his health deteriorating, was returned to the Bekaa valley in the spring of 1985. Fearful that he'd die, his guards requested that he be given medical care in Tehran. He was flown to Tehran from Damascus in early June 1985. He died soon after.

Agency officials knew of Buckley's death by June 1985, yet they held out hope that he might somehow turn up alive. They feared that the 400-page "confession" that had been wrung from him would end up in Soviet hands; they took steps to get their own copy of it. At least part of the reason that Robert McFarlane, Oliver North, and others traveled to Tehran in May 1986 was to get Buckley's testimony and to bring his body back to Washington. But the mission was only partially successful. The team failed to retrieve Buckley's body, but it retrieved his confession, either in the form of a document or a video or both. CIA officials all but confirm that Buckley's testimony as well as recordings and a videotape of his session with his Hezbollah torturers were handed over to the United States in Tehran or soon thereafter.

Epilogue

PERHAPS ONE DAY THE REAL STORY OF the CIA's rescue attempt will be made public. As things stand now, there are many villains in the Buckley story and many unanswered questions.

Or maybe the answer to the riddle is simple. Perhaps the disease that afflicts every other government department has finally infected the CIA. Perhaps the Agency is incompetent. There's a hint of this point of view on the public record: It's not that the Agency doesn't want to run covert operations, Richard Secord told the Senate committee that investigated the Iran-contra affair, it's that it doesn't know how to. And Casey often complained that the Agency had lost its tone, that it had become fat and happy. He vowed to reinvigorate it or find a way to run operations some other way.

Buckley had witnessed bureaucratic incompetence and rebelled against it. Casey saw this rough-hewn individualism in Buckley and rewarded him for it. He felt that Buckley understood the nature of the Agency's problems. Casey undoubtedly knew that Buckley was a victim of the Agency's paralysis; why else would he have decided to trust Oliver North and the NSA to retrieve Buckley and not the CIA's covert action staff? When North's attempt failed, Casey was sickened by the horror of it all.

Casey was given final proof of this failure in the form of the videotape of Buckley's torture and confession. The head of the CIA wept openly, then delivered the tape to Ronald Reagan. On an unusually humid night in June 1986, the head of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the president of the United States played back the videotape at the White House. It was almost too much for either of them to bear. They viewed it with the fervent hope that Buckley had not suffered too much, that in his dying moments he'd somehow been given some forlorn comfort. Reagan was stunned by what he saw. Casey was enraged.

No one knows now what vow Casey made that night, nor what retribution, if any, he planned. But this we know: the friends of William Buckley believe that Casey is a hero, a man who has been too often maligned and too easily misunderstood. For those who honored Buckley during a simple ceremony on a hillside in Arlington National Cemetery, William Casey was part of a dream: a dream that the Agency could be mastered, controlled, and made to work, that it could become a truer defender of the nation than it had ever been.

In the final analysis, this had been William Casey's finest dream—and William Buckley's only hope. R

1ST STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

May 14, 1988

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HEADLINE: Casey's man in Beirut: the 'burning' of William Buckley; CIA employee William Buckley sent back to Middle East too soon after identity revealed in CIA files taken by rioters at US Embassy in Islamabad

BYLINE: Perry, Mark

BODY:

When historians write the final chapter on the Iran /contra affair, they will probably center an important part of their story on the Reagan Administration's attempt to gain the release of the Central Intelligence Agency's kidnapped Beirut station chief, William Buckley. Buckley's seizure by Islamic fundamentalists in Beirut on March 16, 1984, has been relegated to a secondary episode in the sleazy story of arms-for-hostage dealings. However, his death at the hands of his torturers, reportedly in mid-1985, is beginning to take on added importance for Washington investigators.

The Buckley kidnapping ignited a round of furious activity inside the C.I.A., whose attempts to find the missing station chief included ordering high-resolution satellite photographs of Beirut and its environs and calling on former agency "helpers" in the region to search Beirut's Shiite neighborhoods. The U.S. government also dispatched a highly trained Army team of covert operations experts from the Intelligence Support Activity into the back streets of Beirut to dig up information on the missing counterterrorism expert [see Perry, "The I.S.A. Behind the N.S.C.," The Nation, January 17, 1987). None of this worked, a fact that caused considerable consternation among agency officials, who had been confident the combination of technical and human intelligence assets could at least pick up a trace of Buckley. It was clear within a matter of weeks that extraordinary measures would have to be initiated to effect Buckley's return.

One such step was the agency's apparent approval of a trip by Theodore Shackley, former C.I.A. associate deputy director for operations, to Hamburg, West Germany, to meet with Manucher Ghorbanifar, a former Iranian businessman believed to have ties with anti-Khomeini forces in Iran and in exile in Europe. Shackley's meeting with Ghorbanifar shows just how desperate the agency had become: Not four months before, Ghorbanifar had failed a series of polygraph tests and the C.I.A. had issued a "fabricator notice" on him ' Still, if there was any hope at all, the C.I.A. was willing to take the gamble.

Shackley's November 1984 meeting with Ghorbanifar came about because of the veteran agent's continued contact with Gen. Manucher Hashemi, the former head of the counter-espionage section of the Shah's secret police, Savak. There is still disagreement about whether Shackley undertook the Buckley mission on his own, at Hashemi's instigation or as part of an agency program. But there is little doubt that Hashemi's involvement gave the sleazy Ghorbanifar the imprimatur of credibility he had hitherto lacked. Most important, says one

high-level intelligence community source, "Shackley's involvement personalized the search for Buckley, " something the agency was initially loath to do.

Ted Shackley's contact with Ghorbanifar and his plan to ransom Buckley and other U.S. hostages held by Islamic revolutionaries was short-lived: After reporting on the substance of his meeting to U.S. officials in November 1984, Shackley was told to cease the discussion because Ghorbanifar's plan was viewed as a "scam." But why had Shackley become involved in the search for Buckley to begin with? The answer offers an insight into the comparatively small world of espionage operatives and government intelligence experts. Shackley and Buckley first served together in Vietnam, according to informed intelligence sources, including a retired C.I.A. official who worked with them both. Shackley's involvement in that war is a matter of public record: According to published reports, after putting in stints as C.I.A. station chief in Miami and Vientiane, Laos, he served as station chief in Saigon from 1969 to 1972. The nature of Buckley's involvement in Vietnam is much less clear and is the subject of continuing comment among his fr iends at the C.I.A.

"Here was a guy who knew no limits," one agency source says bluntly. "When he was in Vietnam we had one hell of a problem with him. We finally had to ship him out of the country. He knew no limits, he just loved the game." According to this source, Buckley's personal behavior (in particular his obsessive womanizing) upset a number of his colleagues, who feared it would result in security breaches that could harm U.S. operations in Southeast Asia. According to this same source, who said he thought it "unseemly to go into this guy's background, especially considering the circumstances [of his death], " Buckley was a zealous operator and an ambitious competitor for the attention of his superiors. "Listen," the former colleague the fact of the matter is that Buckley was a real asshole in Vietnam. Everyone wanted to get rid of him." Buckley's personal problems, the talk of the C.I.A. station in Saigon, were what forced his transfer to other assignments, but "it never bothered Buckley. He thought he was immor tal."

After a short stint at C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Virginia, where Buckley began honing his skills as the agency's top counterterrorism expert, he was shipped to the Middle East. His first assignment was in Damascus, where he served as an analyst responsible for assessing Syria's repressive government. During his stay in Damascus, Buckley was posted to Cairo for a short period to help train President Anwar el-Sadat's bodyguards. His performance there brought him plaudits from security specialists dispatched under contract from the Pentagon .

Buckley was next transferred to the C.I.A. station in Islamabad, Pakistan, in mid-1978 -an assignment that, as it turned out, would change his life forever. Islamabad was feeling the influence of the Islamic fundamentalist movement that swept the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to power in Iran the following February. The seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran by Iranian Revolutionary Guards on November 4, 1979, was followed by similar actions throughout the region. By far the worst of these attacks took place November 20-21.

On November 20, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, a band of 300 well-armed fundamentalists led by a self-proclaimed Mahdi-an Islamic Shiite Messiah-seized the Grand Mosque, Islam's holiest shrine. The Saudi government reacted swiftly and brutally. The mosque was recaptured by the Saudi National Guard (trained by military experts under an ongoing contract with the Vinnell Corporation of

Fairfax, Virginia), causing hundreds of casualties.

Iranian claims that the United States and Israel were involved in the action provoked an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad on November 21 by a mob of Pakistani fundamentalists, who forced about ninety embassy employees, including William Buckley, to take refuge in the embassy's third-floor security vault. The Islamabad incident cost the lives of two Americans, and the United States was fortunate to avoid a massacre, as Pakistani riot police were slow to respond. Most embassy personnel, including Buckley, escaped by climbing onto the ro of of the building.

The attack was, however, one of the least-publicized intelligence disasters in modern history: The rioters gained access to highly secret U.S. intelligence information contained in embassy files, information that had widespread ramifications for C.I.A. sources in the Middle East and/or Southwest Asia. When news of the sacking of the embassy in Islamabad reached Langley, agency officials were furious that such classified files had been kept openly on the embassy premises. "There's no excuse for that," one retired intelligence expert commented. "You have to wonder what the hell they were doing with all that paper-what good did they think it would do them. There's a reason we have computers; they should have used them." According to this same source, the C.I.A. "should have seen it [the Islamabad incident] coming."

After this brush with disaster, William Buckley was hustled out of Pakistan by way of the British Embassy and debriefed by C.I.A. terrorism experts at Langley. If nothing else, Buckley's Islamabad experience gave him first-hand knowledge of the dangers that Islamic fundamentalism posed to U.S. interests in the region. It also won him respect among agency professionals who had been in similar scrapes. The problem was that Buckley's experience could no longer be used in the Middle East.

A longstanding C.I.A. rule, according to an employee of the agency, says that no agent who has"burned," or identified, may "return to the same theater of operations for five years." The rule is ironclad, designed to reassure C.I.A. operatives that their lives are valued by their government. Accordingly, Buckley was cooled off by the agency by being assigned as a corporate official to PEMEX, the government-owned petroleum corporation of Mexico. But the C.I.A. soon needed Buckley back at Langley. By early 1982 he was serving as the agency's resident expert on counterterrorism. He was in the right place at the right time, for counterterrorism was Washington's newest, most chic area of expertise.

The Reagan Administration's obsession with defending U.S. interests in the Middle East had grown out of the events of the previous three years, 1979 to 1981. First was the Iranian Revolution itself, followed by the hostage crisis. The riots in Islamabad were re-enacted in cities throughout the Indian subcontinent, in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Calcutta. U.S. morale seemed to recover somewhat after two American fighters downed a Libyan jet over the Gulf of Sidra in August 1981. But just two months later, on October 6, the Reagan Administration was shocked yet again, when one of its most constant allies, Anwar el-Sadat, was killed in a hail of bullets while reviewing a military parade outside of Cairo. The assassination was a major embarrassment for the U.S. government, which had helped assure Sadat 's safety.

Given the worsening turmoil in the Middle East, it was not surprising that

Director of Central Intelligence William Casey should decide to call on Buckley, an old hand at counterterrorism. The Administration's new emphasis on the field was causing some problems for the agency: Among other things, according to an intelligence expert who now works with a private government security contractor, "everyone wanted to get into the act; everyone wanted to have a piece of the counterterrorism pie." Upward of twenty-six different U.S. agencies were interested in helping formulate policy, turning the Administration's counterterrorism planning into a bureaucratic nightmare. Buckley's job was to make sense of the program. According to one intelligence expert, he did yeoman's work.

Yet Buckley's real value to the C.I.A. did not become dear until 1983, as difficult a year for the agency as any in recent history. On April 18, 1983, a truck idled with explosives detonated on the grounds of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing sixty-three people, including seventeen Americans. Among the dead was the C.I.A. 's highly regarded Middle East section chief, Robert Ames, who was in Beirut on a forty-eight-hour visit. As in Islamabad, the agency had suffered a major intelligence disaster, this time compounded by embarrassment. The bombing had been carried out with such precision that the Islamic fundamentalists responsible must have known they were targeting one of the C.I.A.'s moat important human assets. The agency needed to respond vigorously to the loss of Ames, if for no other reason than to assure its operatives that they would remain protected in highly volatile settings like Beirut.

Soon after the bombing, William Casey began casting around for Ames's replacement. He settled on Buckley, who not only had Middle East experience but who, owing to his expertise on counterterrorism, would know how to protect himself in the super-heated Beirut environment. Unfortunately, Casey either forgot about the agency's five-year rule prohibiting agents from serving in an area of operations in which they had been identified, or-more likely-purposely ignored it. In any event, Buckley found himself serving as the C.I.A.'s new station chief in Beirut at the end of 1983, a position that made him the target of the same terrorists who killed Ames.

Intelligence officials at the C.I.A. are still enraged by Casey's decision and his flaunting of procedures. "It was an outrage, an absolute outrage, that Buckley was sent back to Beirut," one official says angrily. "They had no business doing that. But when Ames died they needed someone with Mideast experience. A planning board, a committee called the Senior Planning Group, gets together and makes a decision on which operations officer gets assigned to which theater. And they pass on all such assignments. The group is composed of high-ranking C.I.A. officials with experience in the field. The recommendation is passed on to the D.C.I. [Director of Central Intelligence], in this instance to Casey, and it's his decision. . . . So Casey called in Buckley and said, 'You're going to Beirut. We need you there.' "

Although Buckley didn't want the Beirut assignment, he knew that it was unusual for an agent to turn down such a posting, especially when the request was made personally by the head of the agency. One intelligence analyst says that Buckley was given "a monetary inducement" to take the assignment "because it was so dangerous," a report that spread through intelligence circles without confirmation. Intelligence experts now agree that Buckley almost immediately reverted to his old Vietnam habits in Beirut, making him an instantly visible target. He "drove around in a limousine that had C.I.A. written all over it," says one authoritative source. Although Buckley undoubtedly knew what he

was getting into, he seemed almost to invite danger"They had him made as soon as he got off the plane," a colleague says. "And he knew it."

For what it's worth, Casey did everything he could to get Buckley back after his kidnapping, including dispatching two teams of intelligence agents to locate him. But those efforts failed: Buckley was tortured by his captors and eventually died of neglect. A videotape of his "confession" was obtained by C.I.A. officials, who were outraged at the brutality of his kidnappers.

There is one final irony to the Buckley story. Within a month of the kidnapping, President Reagan asked that America's counterterrorism policy be upgraded and that more government resources be earmarked for dealing with the problem. Accordingly, Reagan signed NSDD [National Security Decision Directive] 138, designating twenty-six different Federal departments, agencies and bureaus to come up with recommendations on how to stop terrorism. It thereby replicated exactly the kind of bureaucratic chaos that Buckley had been asked to stop in 1982.

More than four years after the Buckley kidnapping, the incident has become, for intelligence experts, a symbol of the C.I.A.'s failure in the Middle East. The Reagan Administration continues to defend the record of former Director of Central Intelligence Casey, who is still considered a national hero by those who carried out the Iran/contra operation. Those who knew William Buckley disagree: They wonder what might (or might not) have happened had William Casey stuck to C.I.A. rules and decided to send someone else to Beirut.

SUBJECT: United States. Central Intelligence Agency, management; Spies, identification; Middle East, relations with the United States

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LEVEL 1 - 1 OF 1 STORY

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HEADLINE: Putting vets in the shredder; Veterans Administration accused of shredding documents of mishandled claims

BYLINE: Perry, Mark

BODY:

Putting Vets In the Shredder

In 1985, when the Supreme Court upheld an 1862 statute that puts a $ 10 limit on the amount veterans may pay lawyers for representing them in benefits cases against the Veterans Administration, it conceded that certain classes of veterans might be adversely affected by the ruling. This opening was used by the National Association of Radiation Survivors (NARS) to press a lawsuit against V.A. Administrator Thomas Turnage, alleging that nonlawyer service representatives (advisers trained to argue cases before the V.A., heavily utilized by veterans' organizations) did not argue claims for increased compensation as effectively as lawyers and that they failed to collect, let alone understand, medical and other technical evidence necessary to prove the claims of servicemen who were exposed to atomic radiation.

In Federal District Court in San Francisco in early May 1986, Judge Marilyn Hall Patel told NARS attorney Gordon Erspamer that he could proceed with requests for V.A. records showing how the agency handles radiation-based benefits claims. The ruling caused a minor hubbub at the Veterans Administration, which claimed the NARS suit would cost the government millions of dollars. Erspamer, a lawyer with the San Francisco firm of Morrison and Foerster (which had taken the case on a pro bono basis), fired back at the V.A. in late May during hearings on the NARS claim before the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Erspamer told the committee the V.A. wasn't as concerned about the cost of the suit as it was with potential embarrassment that would result from meeting his discovery requests. Erspamer went further, telling the committee and members of the press that he thought the V.A. "obviously has something to hide.'

Within a week of his testimony, the lawyer received confirmation of his allegations in a letter from an anonymous V.A. official. "Your statement before the House Veterans Affairs Committee on May 20, 1986, was accurate and true,' the official, who was perhaps inevitably dubbed "Deep Throat' by Erspamer, wrote. "The Veterans Administration does not systematically provide veterans with adequate due process.' The letter went on to outline the kinds of discovery requests Erspamer should make to receive evidence that the V.A. disallows benefits claims in order to "statistically enhance the data that measures the timeliness of [veterans'] claims processing.'

According to V.A. employees, the Deep Throat letter in May touched off a "major explosion in the agency.' In June, just weeks after Erspamer received the letter, V.A. officials began a systematic destruction of the documents

requested by NARS in its lawsuit, according to V.A. sources.

Allegations that V.A. officials were destroying documents to cover up embarrassing policies spurred Erspamer to lash out at the agency during a June 1986 interview with this reporter: "It's clear that the V.A. routinely loses veterans' records. The fact of the matter is that it's chaos over there. No wonder they're embarrassed. They don't answer letters, they don't inform veterans of their rights--they're looking for excuses to ignore veterans' needs. They just don't want that to come out.'

The Deep Throat allegations, Erspamer discovered, had a basis in decades of V.A. policies that allow claims adjudicators to reject a petition for benefits for the slimmest of reasons. In effect, the V.A. rewards its adjudicators according to the number of claims they process, evaluating their performance according to "end product codes.' The more claims an adjudicator processes, the more end product codes he or she accumulates. Since it takes a shorter time to kill a claim than approve it, the tendency to reject claims for lack of information is reinforced.

Soon after Erspamer's appearance on Capitol Hill, NARS attorneys began another round of discovery requests for agency documents. That touched off another letter from the anonymous V.A. employee: "Your interrogatories recently sent to the Veterans Administration have been received,' the insider wrote on July 11. "You are headed in the right direction. However, there is a conspiracy by the supervisors of the Field Operations Staff in the Compensation and Pension Service to deny you the information requested. If you do not specifically name the correct form or record, they intend to indicate they have no record.'

Erspamer was stunned. Not only were V.A. employees destroying documents, they were impeding a Federal court case. If that could be proved, top officials could be indicted for obstruction of justice or contempt of court, or both. Also, in July, according to Justice Department officials, the department's criminal division assigned two new lawyers to the team of five already formed to defend the V.A.

The second Deep Throat letter had more serious consequences than the first. According to V.A. employees, agency officials went on a witch hunt in an attempt to identify the author of the letters. Several employees claimed they were threatened with reprisals by agency officers. One employee, V.A. lawyer Ronald Abrams, arrived at work and was handed a drawing of a Star of David with a swastika inside it. Abrams claimed he was targeted by higher-ups who believed he was "an agency mole,' probably because he had warned the V.A. top echelon that the agency was vulnerable to claims of systematically denying veterans due process.

Abrams was clearly frightened and made a private call to Judge Patel to complain of the harassment. Erspamer and Ted Hirt, a lawyer for the Justice Department, joined the conversation in a conference call. Abrams told Patel that V.A. officials were telling other employees, "I am the cause of these problems. I'm Deep Throat.' Patel reacted swiftly, telling Hirt to inform V.A. officers that any threats against employees called to testify in the lawsuit "could constitute criminal conduct.'

In an interview with this reporter, Abrams confirmed Erspamer's claim that the V.A. was destroying evidence required in the lawsuit, perhaps hundreds of thousands of pages of documents showing malfeasance in handling veterans' claims. According to Abrams, "The V.A. shredder was working overtime.' Abrams's former boss, Michael Dunlap, later told a special House and Senate joint committee hearing on the scandal that the document destruction was "a routine purge of V.A. files.'

The V.A.'s claim was almost laughable, or, as Judge Patel put it, "inherently incredible.' Not only were the documents that were destroyed valuable to the NARS case, it was the first time the agency had conducted a "routine purge' of its files in over a decade, though some employees said that a similar purge had taken place in 1982. Patel wasn't the only one who didn't take Dunlap's S.O.P. defense seriously. "The destruction [of documents] was across the board,' a V.A. official told me during an interview earlier this year. "As far as I'm concerned, they went after everything in sight.'

Last January 8, in an unprecedented move, Patel slapped the V.A. with a fine of $ 120,000 and appointed a "special master' to oversee compliance with Erspamer's discovery requests. Patel implied that V.A. officials might also be vulnerable to charges of perjury as a result of sworn depositions that Erspamer's request for records on radiation claims could not be complied with because it would mean going through 35 million different sets of records. Patel apparentl y believed the V.A. was stonewalling and told it to pay the costs of the court-appointed monitor.

According to one Justice Department official, Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d directed lawyers in the civil division to take over primary responsibility for defending the V.A. "We couldn't believe how stupid the agency had acted,' the source said. "You don't have to be a lawyer to figure out that you shouldn't go out and destroy documents.'

Within weeks of Patel's fine, the number of Justice Department lawyers working on the case had increased from seven to eleven, and by midsummer, a total of eighteen lawyers were assigned to the case. When the trial began on September 8, twenty-two government lawyers were assigned to the case, and defending the V.A. against the lawsuit and charges of cover-up had consumed $ 2.5 million. (The Justice Department lawyers would not comment on the case, citing departmental rules and "longstanding legal traditions' barring lawyers from commenting on cases until they have been decided.)

On Capitol Hill, defenders of the agency attempted to head off damage caused by the NARS revelations. The V.A.'s chief proponent, Mississippi Representative G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery, chair of the Veterans Affairs Committee, had to be badgered into holding hearings on the growing scandal, and when they finally opened in March he attacked NARS lawyer Erspamer for having "a chip on his shoulder.' Apparently, Montgomery was unaware of the truth of his statement--Erspamer's father died of leukemia, in all likelihood caused by exposure to atmospheric atomic tests conducted in Nevada.

Last February Representative Don Edwards ordered the General Accounting Office to launch an investigation of the V.A.'s inability to comply with court requests. But the most surprising revelation came from V.A. officials, who acknowledged that all radiation claims had been computerized in 1982, so that they did not have to search 35 million files after all.

Even so, members of Congress were fearful that concerns over the V.A.'s actions would die down in the months prior to the opening of the NARS trial in early September. While the Congressional hearings had brought V.A. practices into public view, the burgeoning scandal had yet to make front-page news--a fact that Representative Lane Evans, for one, believed was necessary to spur "a top-to-bottom overhaul' of the agency. Evans and a number of House and Senate colleagues, including Representative James Florio and Senator Alan Cranston, hoped that the NARS revelations would speed passage of legislation granting veterans the right to take the V.A. to court over benefits claims--a bill that had been stopped dead by Sonny Montgomery in five straight Congressional sessions.

Evans need not have wrorried. Over the past six months, the V.A. has been hit by two government reports and a new scandal. In May 1987 to G.A.O. released an audit of nine V.A. hospitals (out of seventy-two) that criticized the agency for "systematically failing to investigate' patient injuries, surgical complications and unexpected deaths in those facilities. In one case, V.A. medical personnel put a critically ill patient in a cab for a 300-mile trip to receive radiation treatment. He arrived dead. Those involved failed to conduct an autopsy to find the cause of death, saying the patient died of lung cancer. G.A.O. investigators noted that the V.A. failed to engage in routine medical investigations in 86 percent of all cases.

Soon after the release of the G.A.O. report, the House Committee on Government Operations published its own, "Patients at Risk: A Study of Deficiencies in the Veterans Administration Medical Quality Assurance Program.' This report found that V.A. hospitals were riddled with "preventable errors,' particularly in cardiac care units. The report gave some horrifying examples: At the Memphis V.A. Medical Center a doctor killed a patient by accidentally cutting a hole in his left ventricle. Nor was that case without parallel. According to the report, mortality rates are twice the national average in V.A. medical centers in Indianapolis; Iowa City; Lexington, Kentucky; Nashville; San Diego; and Washington.

The report went on to note problems in other areas, paying special attention to one case (apparently typical) of a mental patient who sued the V.A. after fifteen years of careless treatment. Judge Patel summarized what a number of health care officials have been saying privately about the quality of care by the agency: "If this case were a fictional scenario, the author would have to have been Franz Kafka. [The patient] was buffeted by a blind bureaucracy which provided more torture than treatment.'

But the worst was yet to come. As the NARS lawsuit against the V.A. went to trial, a V.A. employee leaked a medical report the agency had not intended to publish on the impact of Agent Orange on Vietnam veterans. According to a source in the V.A., the report had been suppressed "at the highest levels' of the agency since February of this year. The report shows an "unexplained excess of deaths' from non-Hodgkins lymphoma, a rare form of cancer, "among marines who served in Vietnam.' Specifically, the study showed that marines who served in Vietnam had a 58 percent higher rate of lung cancer than would be expected and a 110 percent higher rate of non-Hodgkins lymphomas. The report's findings came after nearly eight years of official denial that the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam had caused any increased incidence of cancer.

"This is the strangest thing I've ever seen,' Representative Edwards says. "It's the first government report I've read that doesn't have a date on it.' Evans added, "I'd like to know what other reports the V.A. is hiding. This is just one report; there are probably a few more.'

In fact, there are at least nine. According to court documents recently leaked to reporters, the V.A. has prepared at least six medical studies of veterans without making them public. They include a report on the impact of other chemical agents on veterans, as well as case-control studies of the incidence of soft-tissue sarcomas among those who served in Vietnam. The nine reports were obtained through litigation against the V.A. by Vietnam veterans in California. The agency had objected to turning over the secret reports to plaintiffs during the discovery process (by now a well-worn V.A. legal tactic) because, in the words of its doctors, "Premature disclosure may preclude the ability of the scientists involved from obtaining publication, since some publishers will not publish studies that have already been publicly disseminated.'

Coupled with the NARS suit, the publication of investigative reports by the G.A.O., the House Committee on Government Operations and the leaked V.A. study on Agent Orange has made the Veterans Administration the most embattled agency in Washington. For the V.A.'s defenders, the newest revelations mean that the spreading scandal will probably not be brought under control until a new V.A. administrator is named. Even more serious, the NARS lawsuit threatens to undermine the alliance among V.A. backers and the veterans' organizations that provide millions of dollars in campaign contributions to those who defend the agency against all critics.

The Justice Department is still scrambling to contain the scandal. According to Justice Department lawyers working in the department's antitrust division, "The people over there [in the civil division] are going wild' over the NARS lawsuit. Apparently, they fear that responsibility for the destruction of V.A. files rests in the upper reaches of the agency, or beyond. Even Attorney General Meese, these sources say, is watching the case closely, perhaps in the knowledge that the burgeoning V.A. scandal could do to Ronald Reagan's domestic policy what retired Maj. Gen. Richard Secord and his Iran/contra affair friends did to his foreign policy.

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BYLINE: Perry, Mark

BODY:

THE I.S.A. BEHIND THE N.S.C.

Although much has been written about the Iran/ contra arms deal, too little attention has been paid to the role of a secret group called the Intelligence Support Activity. The I.S.A., sometimes known as "the Activity,' was responsible for several intelligence and paramilitary operations between 1980 and 1985. The secret wars being run by Lieut. Col. Oliver North from National Security Council headquarters in the basement of the White House were related to the I.S.A.'s rise and fall.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not happy about what was going on in that basement. Adm. William Crowe Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, had been counseling the White House on the dangers of secret operations that were, as one of his aides put it, "clearly out of control.' Crowe's views, like North's activities, have roots in an important controversy inside the military. Since the fall of Saigon, in 1975, America's top officers have been engaged in a bitter fight--involving promotions, careers and personal reputations-- over the nation's foreign and military policies. In a few cases the debate has erupted into the public prints; the Iran/contra scandal is among them.

On one side of the debate are officers who feel that the U.S. defeat in Vietnam was, if not inevitable, at least predictable. That group shares clearly defined political views: the belief that Soviet aggression can be channeled and ultimately weakened; faith in a civilian leadership; and, most important, suspicion of covert military and paramilitary operations run by unsupervised military elites.

On the other side are those who contend that the United States could have won the Vietnam War if only civilian leaders had not interfered. Their views are shared by political conservatives: the belief in the need for an enduring struggle against communism; mistrust of liberals, the press and Congress; and confidence that the United States can finally defeat the Soviet Union through the use of highly trained military and paramilitary counterinsurgency units.

Military officers and some civilians call advocates of the latter position the Vietnam Mafia. Some Pentagon officials call them a nastier name--the Algerian Colonels, after the French officers who, in 1962, tried to kill Gen. Charles de Gaulle for granting Algeria independence. Oliver North can be called a member in good standing of the Algerian colonels. His beliefs are shared by retired Army Maj. Gen. John Singlaub and retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard

Secord, both of whom have been implicated in the Iran/contra affair.

So it came as no surprise to military officers serving in the Pentagon that North was at the center of the scandal. While President Reagan was describing North as a national hero, numerous officers were calling him a braggart, saying he was disloyal and obnoxious. The military's top brass coined a new description for North: "the highest-ranking lieutenant colonel in American history.'

That North is a talented military officer, well schooled in covert military operations, is beyond question. In 1969 he ran paramilitary campaigns while working with anticommunist Hmong tribesmen in Vietnam, and the expertise he earned helped his career. In 1973 he taught special warefare classes to the Third Marine Division and to the elite Fifth Special Forces Group in the Philippines. Eventually, North was transferred to the N.S.C. staff, where he participated in the planning of a half-dozen covert military operations.

According to a fellow marine, North landed his N.S.C. job after playing a key role in coordinating Operation Eagle Claw, the Carter Administration's plan to rescue American hostages from Iran. When Col. Charlie Beckwith's Delta force landed at "Desert One' on the night of April 24, 1980, North was reportedly in the hills northwest of Teheran. He beat a fast retreat when the operation failed but immediately started on a second plan, known in the military as Operation Honey Bear and occasionally referred to incorrectly as Honey Badger. General Secord, former U.S. military liaison in Teheran, worked closely with North in planning Honey Bear. By the time their work was completed, Ronald Reagan was President, and the hostages were home.

North made a habit of being in the right place at the right time. When Reagan was elected, the Pentagon was still in an uproar over the failure of Eagle Claw, which was blamed on inadequate planning. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Edward (Shy) Meyer set out to correct the deficiency. According to Beckwith, Meyer wanted a "joint military organization to combat terrorism,' and he ordered the establishment of a military unit combining intelligence capabilities with paramilitary operations.

This special warfare coordinating group, initially run out of the Pentagon, came to light in April 1983, when Lieut. Col. James (Bo) Gritz spoke to a House subcommittee about his attempted rescue the previous year of prisoners of war who were allegedly still being held in Laos. Gritz told me he had conducted his rescue operation under the aegis of a military intelligence organization called the Activity. While Gritz's account of the missing Americans was later discredited, his report on the Activity was not. Gritz told me he had spoken with Gen. Harold Aaron, Army chief of intelligence, about his operation. Aaron, now deceased, commanded the Fifth Special Forces Group in Vietnam in the years before North taught the unit in the Philippines. Gritz also said he had contact with Rear Adm. Allan Paulson, then a high-level official with the Defense Intelligence Agency. Paulson is no admirer of Gritz, but he confirmed the existence of the Activity as an "intelligence coordinating body.'

Intelligence experts report that the Activity, or I.S.A., carried out a number of intelligence and paramilitary operations, including the 1982 rescue of Brig. Gen. James Dozier from the Italian Red Brigade. According to Jeffrey Richelson in The U.S. Intelligence Community, the unit also reportedly gathered intelligence information for "anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua.'

The most likely coordinator of Activity operations was Gen. John Vessey Jr. Gritz said that Vessey was one of his key military contacts before being promoted to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in 1982. He is best known for his disagreement with Jimmy Carter's plan to withdraw U.S. troops from South Korea. Vessey's views were shared by his colleague in South Korea, John Singlaub, who was forced to resign because of his public disagreement with the President. Reagan remembered Vessey's public criticism of Carter, and when the top post in the Joint Chiefs became open, he gave him the job.

But within two years of its formation, Meyer's joint military operation to combat terrorism got out of hand, and, according to Pentagon officials, the I.S.A. became a problem for the Joint Chiefs. The first problem was Gritz himself, who indiscreetly mentioned the existence of the secret military unit during public testimony. Gritz revealed that the 1982 mission to rescue presumed P.O.W.'s in Laos had been funded without approval from U.S. foreign policy officials. His testimony forced Vessey to order a further investigat ion. It was determined that the I.S.A. had been operating from April 1980 until June 1982 without reporting to or receiving approval from Congress or the White House. There were other indiscretions: I.S.A. officers were appropriating military funds for their personal use. An internal Army investigation in 1985 cited eighty I.S.A. officers for misusing Army funds.

Cracks in the military structure became apparent after Reagan ordered the Marine Corps into Beirut in 1982. "We were all against it,' Vessey says. "It was a real long shot. We just didn't think it would work.'

They weren't alone. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger also opposed the deployment. Secretary of State George Shultz went along, but only at the urging of national security deputy Robert McFarlane and his assistant, Oliver North. Although the press was reporting a falling-out between Shultz and Weinberger, they were in fact allies against N.S.C. attempts to usurp State and Defense Department policy-making functions.

In the week following the bombing of the Marine barracks at Beirut International Airport, which killed 241 soldiers, Vessey was faced with a near revolt. Marine Commandant General and Joint Chiefs member P.X. Kelley told Congress angrily, "I have never in my entire life worked for so many masters.' Kelley refused to take responsibility for lax security measures at the Beirut barracks and exonerated officers in the military chain of command. The message was clear: Kelley believed the death of the marines should be laid squarely on the shoulders of Ronald Reagan and the N.S.C. His testimony was the first hint that something was wrong in the Administration's foreign policy apparatus, and it reflected military suspicions that foreign policy was being run out of the basement of the White House.

The bombing of the barracks in Beirut was more than a simple military failure; it pointed up the inadequacy of U.S. military intelligence. There were also embarrassing special operations failures during the Grenada invasion. According to recent reports, a number of units involved in the landing were under the direct control of the Joint Chiefs and monitored continually by N.S.C. staff. In the wake of the Beirut bombing, the intelligence breakdowns in Granada and reports that the I.S.A. was causing trouble, the Joint Chiefs ordered the creation of a new command to coordinate all special forces operations, the Joint Special Operations Command, or J.S.O.C.

When Vessey ordered the investigation of the I.S.A. in October 1983, the task was assigned to Lieut. Gen. William Odom, an Army intellectual and Sovietologist with a reputation for being hard-nosed. Odom was told to "take the I.S.A. apart.' He apparently did his job well, not only dismantling the secret operation but also admonishing military officers to "run things a little bit more tightly.' General Secord, who headed the Pentagon's office of special operations until his retirement, in 1983, may have been a victim of the housecleaning. One official with the Joint Chiefs told me last week, "Hey, Bill Odom kicked his ass out of here.' Odom's success was rewarded with an appointment to the top spot at the supersecret National Security Agency.

It seems likely that Oliver North was an I.S.A. operative, one of the 250 officers designated to coordinate military intelligenc e and covert activities. North's projects fit the I.S.A. mold: he was a key figure in the Dozier rescue operation, helped coordinate the diversion of the Egyptian airliner following the Achille Lauro hijacking, helped direct Grenada special operations units from his billet at the N.S.C. and was John Singlaub's White House contact in raising funds for the contras. (The Singlaub-North connection goes back to Vietnam, where North's special operations service was conducted under the aegis of the Surveillance and Observation Group, which Singlaub headed.)

One thing that the Iran/contra scandal illuminates is the unintended result of the military's own decision to "take a wrench to the U.S.A.' When General Odom broke up the special operations unit, Pentagon theorists say, he actually drove it underground, out of the control of the Joint Chiefs and into the independent, "privatized' bureaucracy of the National Security Council. That there is a network of special operations military officers serving parallel roles in the civilian sector is beyond dispute.

Their experience with the I.S.A. has made the Joint Chiefs hesitant to push for more paramilitary and covert capabilities , despite the Reagan Administration's policy goal of strengthening the armed forces' capacity to wage "twilight struggles.' Admiral Crowe, the Joint Chiefs' current Chairman, ordered an internal investigation on November 26, the day after the announcement that funds from arms sales to Iran had been diverted to the contras. At a meeting in "the tank,' the sparsely furnished room in the Pentagon where the uniformed heads of the military services convene, Crowe told his colleagues and their deputies to "get to the bottom of this.' Crowe is concerned that military special operations have unwisely been competing with the Central Intelligence Agency in national intelligence gathering since the early 1960s. In addition, he is known to have doubts about whether the United States can effectively conduct "gray area' combat, and thinks it "should stick to what it knows.'

On August 5 of last year Crowe publicly opposed legislation making "special operations' a separate command. He said he feared the move would cause morale problems by creating "an elite.' According to an officer with the Joint Chiefs, Crowe was particularly disturbed by Democratic Senator Sam Nunn's call for a special operations coordinating committee in the N.S.C. --a proposal that bears an uncanny resemblance to the I.S.A.

The legislation passed despite Crowe's opposition. But aides on the Senate Armed Services Committee say the new command will meet Crowe's objections and help bring paramilitary intelligence units "under control.' According to those aides, the legislation will make it easier for the Joint Chiefs to keep an eye on those whom military traditionalists call the cowboys.

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"There's no doubt you have to keep these guys [special operations units] under strict control,' said retired Gen. Andrew Goodpaster, a former aide to Dwight Eisenhower and commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's military forces, during an interview last month. "You have to keep them on a pretty short leash.'

"We [retired military officers] were pretty upset about how Reagan handled the talks in Iceland,' said Gen. David Jones, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. "But that's nothing compared to this. This is a real mess. It will be interesti ng to see where it leads, where all the paths go.'

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